

# IN SEARCH OF THE SUPREME

Volume III

By  
M. K. GANDHI

Compiled and edited by  
V. B. KHER



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yabhai Desai,  
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## TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

*Harijan*, 29-4-'33 p. 2

M. K. GANDHI

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किं च जगत्यां जगत् ।  
 तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः मा गृधः कस्य स्विद् धनम् ॥  
 हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं सुखम् ।  
 तत्त्वं पूषन् अपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥  
 ईशावास्योपनिषद् १,१५

[Behold the Universe in the glory of  
 God: and all that lives and  
 moves on earth.

Leaving the transient, find joy in the  
 Eternal: set not your heart on  
 another's possession.

The Face of truth remains hidden  
 behind a circle of gold.

Unveil it, O God of light, that  
 I who love the true may see!]

Isa Upanishad, verses 1 and 15  
 Translated by J. Mascaro



## EDITORIAL NOTE

There is a law or power higher than our will that regulates events. That power is eternal, all-pervading, at once immanent and transcendental. It is commonly called God. He cannot be experienced by the senses or the mind, for He is infinite. He cannot be described, for, He is indescribable. As Kathopanishad says:

नैव वाचा न मनसा ।  
प्राप्तुं शक्यो न चक्षुषा ॥  
अस्तीति ब्रुवतोऽन्यत्र ।  
कथं तदुपलभ्यते ॥

कठोपनिषद्, ६.१२

[Not by speech, not by mind  
Not by sight can He be apprehended  
How can He be comprehended

Otherwise than by one's saying 'He is!']

He defies definition. If we must, however, define Him, we may state thus: "The sum total of Karma is God. That which impels man to do the right is God. The sum total of all that lives is God. That which makes man the mere plaything of fate is God. He is the denial of the atheist." These definitions, it may be noted, are merely inclusive in their construction.

The concept of God is also expressed in terms of attributes like Truth, Love and Beauty — सत्यं शिवं सुंदरम्— by His devotees. Again, Vedantists define Him negatively as is done in the Upanishads. "Behind all the variety of definitions there would also be a certain sameness which would be unmistakable. For the root is one. God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know."

The existence of God is denied by two classes of objectors. Charles Bradlaugh and others like him fall in the first category. Bradlaugh described himself as an atheist no doubt, but many a Christian declined to regard him as such. "Bradlaugh's denial of God was a denial of Him as He was known to Bradlaugh to have been described. His was an eloquent and indignant protest against the then current theology and the terrible contrast between precept and practice." The denial of God in this case is due to ignorance.

The second category comprises the so-called intellectuals who want proof of His existence. They are not prepared to accept the word of prophets and saints. Saints are generally agreed that it is possible to grasp the supernatural principle by enlarging and deepening human consciousness. That it is within the realm of experience to rise to such heights of consciousness is proved by the testimony of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in various countries and climes. The transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the presence of God is evidence of the realization of such a higher principle. Even in the field of physical sciences, many a phenomenon is taken on faith by the intellectuals. The theory of relativity propounded by Einstein is even today understood by not more than a handful of scientists. Yet the intellectuals do not deny its truth and validity. Reason and faith each has its respective sphere. Faith begins where reason ends. Such faith is not blind but enlightened.

Just as physical sciences have their techniques of investigation, so has mysticism. The basic techniques of both are similar but the difference lies in the fact that to test mystic experience from our present plane of consciousness appears *a priori* impossible. "We would be entitled to be radically sceptical if two things could not be proved—if, firstly, a change in the condition of our consciousness which is open to new possibilities of experience, were inconceivable in principle; and secondly, if the means were not enumerated which would lead to this achievement. Neither supposition is true."\* If the intellectual, without taking the trouble to verify for himself the truth of this statement chooses to reject it as a superstition, there is no help. The fact is that he does not want to follow the path leading to realization and won't take the testimony of eye-witnesses. A belief in the existence of God is held by him to be unnecessary for the progress of humanity. "For such persons the weightiest argument in proof of the existence of God is of no avail. You cannot make a person who

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\* *Indian Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, by Count Hermann Keyserling, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, p. 32.



has stuffed his ears listen to, much less appreciate, the finest music. Even so can you not convince those about the existence of a living God who do not want the conviction."

God has been the object of search for the best of human minds since the dawn of civilization. These souls have not been the monopoly of any chosen people, but have belonged to the whole humanity. The paths they have trodden and the trails they have blazed, have been many and varied. Several of them have recorded their experiences in their own words while, experiences of others have been narrated by their disciples. Lives of these pioneers in the realm of spirit have been characterized by a high degree of divine qualities, described in detail in Canto XVI of the Bhagavadgita. Gandhiji belonged to this race of immortals.

There is an unmistakable trend in industrialized countries towards agnosticism, if not atheism. That the same process is at work in India is discernible to a man with vision. The erosion of faith is essentially due to the gap between the precept and practice of the high priests of religions. Their dogmatism, rigidity of outlook and inability to appreciate the needs, aspirations and problems of the modern man have also been responsible for their failure to interpret religion in language which he can understand.

Gandhiji has a message of hope for the modern man for, he too, belongs to the same age, and has a sympathetic understanding of his problems. He was undoubtedly the instrument of unknown powers, greater than himself, call them divine or revolutionary, as you please. Einstein said of him: "Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."\* Gandhiji had deep, inexhaustible spiritual reserves. "He was obviously not of the world's ordinary coinage; he was minted of a different and rare variety, and often the unknown stared through his eyes."†

The path to God, as everyone knows, is fourfold: ज्ञानयोग (Yoga of Knowledge), भक्तियोग (Yoga of Devotion),

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\* *Gandhi, His Life and Work*, edited by D. G. Tendulkar and others, p. xi.

† From the article "Spirit of India" by Jawaharlal Nehru in *Gandhi, His Life and Work* edited by D. G. Tendulkar & others.

कर्मयोग (Yoga of Action) and राजयोग (Yoga of Psychical Control). Gandhiji was a Karmayogi *par excellence*. His whole life was consecrated to the assertion of the supremacy of the moral law—the law of Truth and Love. He believed in the moral government of the universe and his conception of God was catholic enough to embrace the atheist, the *chandala* as well as the dumb and mute creation and even the vegetable kingdom.

Bhagavadgita was for Gandhiji a book of reference. He found it of great help and called it his *Kamadhenu*. It offers an excellent synthesis of the very best that is in Hindu spiritual thought and culture. Questions such as the nature of God, His relationship with the universe and the destiny of the individual soul have been expounded at length in the Lord's Song aptly called the Song Celestial. Discourses of Gandhiji on the Gita, therefore, find a place of honour in the present collection. To the earnest reader who seeks answers to questions such as, the purpose of human life, how to live and conduct oneself in this world, etc., guidance will be found in the pages of these three volumes. I therefore commend them to his attention and study. I feel sure that he will benefit thereby. "The harvest is plentiful but labourers are few." The harvest reaped will vary directly with the capacity and effort of each labourer.

I have dispensed with the usual foreword to the present collection, for, "no one who wants to start a worthy enterprise should ever wish to have anybody's blessings, not even of the highest in the land. A worthy enterprise carries its own blessing."\*

I am deeply indebted to Shri Shankarlalbhai Banker in more than one way. To his happy inspiration I owe the title under which this collection is being published. He has evinced keen interest in the publication of this collection and has given me sustained guidance and support. In a true sense he has been to me a friend, philosopher and guide. I also wish to thank Shri Jivanjibhai Desai, Managing Trustee of the Navajivan Trust for his co-operation.

Bombay, July, 1961

V. B. Kher

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\* *Harijan*, 23-11-'47, p. 420.



## GLOSSARY

*Acharya*—preceptor

*Antyaj*—an outcaste

*Ashram*—a place of spiritual retirement; a hermitage; a place for study and disciplining life

*Asura*—demon

*Atman*—the Self; the Soul

*Avatar*—an incarnation of God. This word usually denotes the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the God of preservation and sustenance

*Bhagavadgita*—(popularly known as Gita), a part of the great Hindu epic Mahabharata wherein Krishna is the divine hero

*Bhajan Mandalis*—groups formed and organized systematically for singing *bhajans* (hymns) together

*Bhakti*—devotion

*Bhattha*—daily allowance

*Brahmacharya*—continence; celibacy; self-control; also the first stage of a high-caste Hindu's (usually referred to as द्विज [Dwija] in religious texts) religious life

*Brahman*—the Ultimate Reality

*Brahmana*—the first or the highest of the four castes sanctioned by the Hindu religion (literally, one who knows Brahman—Ultimate Reality); see Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra

*Dal*—corps

*Darshan*—sight; vision

*Deva*—God

*Dharma*—religion; duty. A comprehensive Sanskrit term embracing the concepts of law, justice, duty and virtue rolled into one

*Dharna*—the sitting in restraint at the door of a debtor by the creditor or his agent

*Gayatri*—invocation of Sun God, recited by the higher-caste Hindus

*Gita*—see Bhagavadgita

*Gopi*—a milk-maid of Gokul where Krishna, the divine



hero of Mahabharata, is supposed to have spent his childhood

*Guru*—teacher; preceptor

*Harijan*—literally, a man of God; an untouchable. A term first used for untouchables by Gandhiji. Also refers to the weekly *Harijan* founded by Gandhiji in February 1933

*Hridaya*—heart

*Kaliyuga*—according to Hindu mythology there have been four Ages since the beginning of time, viz., सत्ययुग (*Satyayuga*), त्रेतायुग (*Tretayuga*), द्वापरयुग (*Dwaparyuga*) and कलियुग (*Kaliyuga*) the present *yuga*, the Age of universal degeneracy

*Kamadhenu*—the cow of Indra from which each could milk what he wished for. Hence the giver of desired objects

*Karma*—action; the sum total of actions. Also popularly used in the sense of fate (accruing as a result of past actions)

*Kirpan*—a metallic weapon which Sikhs are enjoined to carry

*Kshatriya*—the second of the four castes (the warrior caste) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Vaishya and Shudra

*Lota*—brass or copper container (usually used for water)

*Mahabharata*—one of the great Hindu epics wherein Krishna is the divine hero

*Mantra*—a verse in a religious text; incantation

*Maryada*—restriction; limitation

*Math*—Hindu monastery

*Maya*—creation-illusion; veil hiding the Reality from man's ego

*Moksha*—self-realization

*Mukta*—a realized soul

*Nirvana*—Buddhist term for self-realization; the goal of all pious Buddhists

*Padmanabhas*—servant of the Lord Vishnu, the Hindu God of preservation and sustenance

*Pandit*—learned man

*Panjrapol*—institution for tending cattle, particularly old and infirm

*Poorna Swaraj*—complete or full independence

*Ramayana*—one of the great Hindu epics wherein Rama is the divine hero

*Rishi*—sage

*Sanatan*—believer in Hindu scriptures; also used popularly in the sense of an orthodox person

*Sannyasa*—renunciation of worldly life; the last stage of a high-caste Hindu's religious life

*Sannyasi*—one who has taken *sannyasa*

*Satyagraha*—literally insistence on truth; clinging to truth; soul-force; truth-force

*Savarna*—belonging to high caste

*Shastra*—Hindu scripture

*Shloka*—verse; stanza

*Shuddhi*—conversion to Hinduism; literally, self-purification

*Shudra*—the last of the four castes (the caste of labourers) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya

*Supari*—areca nut

*Swami*—a holy person. Also used in the sense of a master in contrast to a servant

*Swaraj*—self-rule; self-government

*Tapasya*—penance

*Tilak*—caste mark used on fore-head

*Upanishad*—sacred Sanskrit books of the earliest religious philosophy

*Vaishya*—the third of the four castes (caste of traders and agriculturists) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Kshatriya and Shudra

*Varna*—caste based on occupation; see Varnashrama. Also pigmentation of the skin

*Varnasankara*—confusion of castes

*Varnashrama*—the system of four castes (based on occupations) and four stages of life (called Ashramas) for the first three castes (Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya), namely, ब्रह्मचर्य—*Brahmacharya* (Student's stage), गृहस्थ—*Grihastha* (house-holder's stage), वानप्रस्थ *Vanprastha* (forest-dweller's stage) and संन्यास—*Sannyasa* (stage of a recluse) sanctioned by the Hindu religion

*Vishvavidyalaya*—university

*Yajna*—sacrifice

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# IN SEARCH OF THE SUPREME

Volume III



## SECTION ONE : EQUALITY AND UNITY OF RELIGIONS

### I

#### ALL WORLD RELIGIONS ARE TRUE

### I

(The following extract is from a speech of Gandhiji delivered at a public meeting in Trichinopoly on 10-2-'34 which appeared under the title "Towards the Brotherhood of Man".)

I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are all God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.

*Harijan*, 16-2-'34, p. 5

### II

(The following extract is taken from a summary of the speech of Gandhiji in reply to an address by Jains of Coonoor, which appeared in "Weekly Letter—No. 14" by C. S.)

I believe in the truth of all religions of the world. And since my youth upward, it has been a humble but persistent effort on my part to understand the truth of all the religions of the world, and adopt and assimilate in my own thought, word, and deed all that I have found to be best in those religions. The faith that I profess not only permits me to do so but renders it obligatory for me to take the best from whatsoever source it may come.

*Harijan*, 16-2-'34, p. 6 at p. 7



## BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS FROM THE SAME GARDEN

(From "A Christian Letter")

For me the different religions are beautiful flowers from the same garden, or they are branches of the same majestic tree. Therefore they are equally true, though being received and interpreted through human instruments equally imperfect. It is impossible for me to reconcile myself to the idea of conversion after the style that goes on in India and elsewhere today. It is an error which is perhaps the greatest impediment to the world's progress towards peace. 'Warring creeds' is a blasphemous expression. And it fitly describes the state of things in India, the mother as I believe her to be of Religion or religions. If she is truly the mother, the motherhood is on trial. Why should a Christian want to convert a Hindu to Christianity and vice versa? Why should he not be satisfied if the Hindu is a good or godly man? If the morals of a man is a matter of no concern, the form of worship in a particular manner in a church, a mosque or a temple is an empty formula, it may even be a hindrance to individual or social growth, and insistence on a particular form or repetition of a credo may be a potent cause of violent quarrels leading to bloodshed and ending in utter disbelief in Religion, i.e. God Himself.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37, p. 406

## SO MANY BRANCHES OF A TREE

(Originally appeared under the title "Islamic Culture")

A great Muslim asked me what appeared to me strange questions the other day. Strange, because I should have thought that every Muslim who knows me, and this great Muslim knew me, could answer them for me. Here is the dialogue.

*Q.:* Are you the same to Muslims now, that you used to be in South Africa,—their friend, father and guide?

*A.:* I never claimed the privilege of being father to them or anyone in South Africa. But I certainly was their guide and friend. (I may state in passing that I was addressed as Bhai [brother] by them and others.) I am absolutely the same as I was in South Africa, twenty-four years ago. I regard Muslims like other Indians as blood-brothers entitled to the same rights and privileges as any other nation.

*Q.:* Then do you cherish their culture as you would cherish your own Hindu culture?

*A.:* Of course I do. I cannot do otherwise, as I believe Islam and other great religions to be as true as my own. India is the richer for the cultures that Islam and Christianity brought with them. I regard the present antagonisms as a passing phase.

*Q.:* Let me be plain. I do not believe in Akbar's dream. He aimed at fusing all religions into one and producing a new faith. Do you have some such aim?

*A.:* I do not know what Akbar dreamt. I do not aim at any fusion. Each religion has its own contribution to make to human evolution. I regard the great faiths of the world as so many branches of a tree, each distinct from the other though having the same source.

*Harijan*, 28-1-'39, p. 448

## LEAVES ON A TREE

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

Gandhiji was glad to be back once more in the sweepers' colony at Reading Road.\*...Twice during the week he addressed the prayer gathering. On the first day he explained that all prayer, in whatever language or from whatever religion it was, was prayer addressed to one and the same God and taught mankind that all belonged to one family and should bear love to one another.

Echoing Badshah Khan's words at the end of the prayer, Gandhiji said it was a travesty of true religion to consider one's own religion as superior and others, as inferior. All religions enjoined worship of the one God who was all pervasive. He was present in a droplet of water or in a tiny speck of dust. "Even those who worship idols, worship not the stone of which it is made; they try to see God who resides in it." Similarly it was a libel to call the Parsis fire-worshippers or sun-worshippers. The Parsi hymn which Dr. Dinshaw Mehta had recited corresponded to the Gayatri of the Hindus. It was nothing but pure worship of God. Various religions were like the leaves on a tree. No two leaves were alike, yet there was no antagonism between them or between the branches on which they grew. Even so, there is an underlying unity in the variety which we see in God's creation.

*Harijan*, 26-5-'46, p. 154

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\*In Delhi.



## NONE SUPERIOR, NONE INFERIOR

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Mr. Keithan who was here the other day was not quite sure what was at the back of Gandhiji's mind when he said that all religions were not only true but equal. Scientifically, he felt, it was hardly correct to say that all religions are equal. People would make comparisons between animists and theists. "I would say," said Mr. Keithan, "it is no use comparing religions. They are different ways. Do you think we can explain the thing in different terms?"

"You are right when you say that it is impossible to compare them. But the deduction from it is that they are equal. All men are born free and equal, but one is much stronger or weaker than another physically and mentally. Therefore superficially there is no equality between the two. But there is an essential equality. In our nakedness God is not going to think of me as Gandhi and you as Keithan. And what are we in this mighty universe? We are less than atoms, and as between atoms there is no use asking which is smaller and which is bigger. Inherently we are equal. The differences of race and skin and of mind and body and of climate and nation are transitory. In the same way essentially all religions are equal. If you read the Koran, you must read it with the eye of the Muslim; if you read the Bible, you must read it with the eye of the Christian; if you read the Gita, you must read it with the eye of a Hindu. Where is the use of scanning details and then holding up a religion to ridicule? Take the very first chapter of Genesis or of Matthew. We read a long pedigree and then at the end we are told Jesus was born of a virgin. You come up against a blind wall. But I must read it all with the eye of a Christian."

"Then," said Mr. Keithan, "even in our Bible there is the question of Moses and Jesus. We must hold them to be equal?"

“Yes,” said Gandhiji. “All prophets are equal. It is a horizontal plane.”

“If we think in terms of Einstein’s Relativity all are equal. But I cannot happily express the equality.”

“That is why I say they are equally true and equally imperfect. The finer the line you draw, the nearer it approaches Euclid’s true straight line, but it never is the true straight line. The tree of Religion is the same, there is not that physical equality between the branches. They are all growing, and the person who belongs to the growing branch must not gloat over it and say, ‘Mine is the superior one’. None is superior, none is inferior, to the other.”

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37, p. 37 at p. 38

## 6

### SHOULD THERE BE ONLY ONE RELIGION?

(From “Gandhiji’s Walking Tour Diary”)

*Q.*: If there is only one God, should there not be only one religion?

*Gandhiji’s reply*: This was a strange question. Just as a tree had a million leaves, similarly though God was one, there were as many religions as there were men and women though they were rooted in one God. They did not see this plain truth because they were followers of different prophets and claimed as many religions as there were prophets. As a matter of fact whilst he believed himself to be a Hindu, he knew that he did not worship God in the same manner as one or all of them.

*Harijan*, 16-3-'47, p. 61 at p. 63



## ALL-INCLUSIVE HINDUISM

## I

(From "Gandhiji's Statement")

My Hinduism is not sectarian. It includes all that I know to be best in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. I approach politics as everything else in a religious spirit. Truth is my religion and Ahimsa is the only way of its realization.

*Harijan*, 30-4-'38, p. 98 at p. 99

## II

(From "The Delhi Interlude")

Gandhiji began by saying that he continued to receive letters accusing him of having become a slave of Jinnah-saheb and a fifth columnist. But he was impervious to such outpourings. The *shlokas* of the Gita to which they listened everyday were always with him to sustain him and he was sure his accusers did not know or understand them. It was because he was a Sanatani Hindu that he claimed to be a Christian, a Buddhist and a Muslim. Some Muslim friends also felt that he had no right to read Arabic verses from the Koran but such did not know that true religion transcended language and scripture. He did not see any reason why he should not read the *Kalma*, why he should not praise Allah, and why he should not acclaim Mohammed as His Prophet. He believed in all the great prophets and saints of every religion. He would continue to ask God to give him the strength not to be angry with his accusers but to be prepared even to die at their hands without wishing them ill. He claimed that Hinduism was all-inclusive and he was sure that if he lived up to his convictions, he would have served not only Hinduism but Islam also.

*Harijan*, 27-4-'47, p. 122

## CHRIST BELONGS TO THE WHOLE HUMANITY

(From "Shrirampur Diary")

Readings from the Bible formed a special feature of Gandhiji's prayer meeting today, (25-12-'46) the birth-day of Jesus Christ. Addressing the gathering, Gandhiji said that he had begun to believe in a toleration which he would call the equality of all religions. He added that Jesus Christ might be looked upon as belonging to Christians only, but he really did not belong to any community, in as much as the lessons that Jesus Christ gave belonged to the whole world.

*Harijan*, 26-1-'47, p. 517

## A REVERENTIAL APPROACH TO FAITHS

### I

(From Introduction by Gandhiji to *The Sayings of Muhammad* translated and edited by Allama Sir Abdullah Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy)

I have read Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy's collections of the sayings of the Prophet with much interest and profit. They are among the treasures of mankind, not merely Muslims.

I am a believer in the truth of all the great religions of the world. There will be no lasting peace on earth unless we learn not merely to tolerate but even to respect the other faiths as our own. A reverent study of the sayings of different teachers of mankind is a step in the direction of such mutual respect.

## II

(Originally appeared under the title "Need for Tolerance", translated from *Harijanbandhu* by Pyarelal)

A Musalman friend has addressed me a long letter of which the following is the gist:

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"You regard Mohammed as a Prophet of God and hold him in high regard. You have even publicly spoken of him in the highest terms. I have heard and even seen reports in cold print to the effect that you have studied the Koran itself. All this, I must confess, has puzzled me. I am at a loss to understand how a person like you, with all your passion for truth and justice, who has never failed to gloze over a single fault in Hinduism or to repudiate as unauthentic the numerous corruptions that masquerade under it, can holus-bolus accept all that is in the Koran. I am not aware of your ever having called into question or denounced any iniquitous injunction of Islam. Against some of these I learnt to revolt when I was scarcely 18 or 20 years old, and time has since only strengthened that first feeling."

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Now for Islam. I stand by every word that I have written in that connection. I have nowhere said that I believe literally in every word of the Koran, or for the matter of that of any scripture in the world. But it is no business of mine to criticize the scriptures of other faiths, or to point out their defects. It is and should be, however, my privilege to proclaim and practise the truths that there may be in them. I may not, therefore, criticize or condemn things in the Koran or the life of the Prophet that I cannot understand. But I welcome every opportunity to express my admiration for such aspects of his life as I have been able to appreciate and understand. As for things that present difficulties, I am content to see them through the eyes of the devout Musalman friends, while I try to understand them with the help of the writings of eminent Muslim expounders of Islam. It is only through such a reverential approach to faiths other than mine that I can realize the principle of equality of all religions. But it is both my right and duty to point out the defects in Hinduism in



order to purify it and to keep it pure. But when non-Hindu critics set about criticizing Hinduism and cataloguing its faults they only blazon their own ignorance of Hinduism and their incapacity to regard it from the Hindu viewpoint. It distorts the vision and vitiates their judgment. Thus my own experience of the non-Hindu critics of Hinduism brings home to me my limitations and teaches me to be wary of launching on a criticism of Islam or Christianity and their founders.

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37, p. 33

## 10

## EQUAL RESPECT FOR RELIGIONS

(On the 18th inst. Gandhiji performed the opening ceremony of the Lakshminarayan Temple and the Buddha Vihar built by Birla Brothers in Delhi. The Temple and the Vihar are open for worship to the whole Hindu public including the Jains and the Sikhs as also for those of other faiths who may care to visit them. The vast concourse of people that had gathered made it very difficult for Gandhiji to enter the temple precincts, and the microphone arrangements broke down. He, therefore, could not address the gathering, but later issued to the Press what he would, under normal conditions have spoken.)

These two temples have been constructed at the instance of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and are the result of the munificence of the House of Birlas, principally of Shri Jugal Kishore Birla who is particularly inclined in this direction. It would have been in the fitness of things if the temples had been opened by Malaviyaji who inspired their construction. But as he is not here, it has fallen to my lot to perform the ceremony.

It is my hope that both these temples will make a special contribution to promote the religious sense of the worshippers. The temple of Buddha admits of no untouchability. But even in the temple of Krishna untouchability and the idea of high and low are taboo. For me, untouchability and the idea of high and low have no room in Hinduism. There are the Varnas, but none of the Varnas is superior to the other. Varna does not connote superiority; it connotes different functions and different duties.

Whoever has more of the earthly or spiritual goods has to perform more service to the community, has to be more humble. The moment untouchability and the sense of high and low crept in, Hinduism began to decline. Hinduism is based on the firm foundation of truth and non-violence and, therefore, there is no room in it for conflict with other religions.

It must be the daily prayer of every adherent of the Hindu faith that every known religion of the world should serve the whole of humanity. I hope that these temples will serve to propagate the idea of equal respect for religions and to make communal jealousies and strife things of the past.

*Harijan*, 25-3-'39, p. 67

# 11

## IS RELIGIOUS UNITY POSSIBLE?

(From "Weekly Letter"—by M. D.)

Sir Chandrashekharan Venkata Raman came up the hill one afternoon with Professor Rahm from Switzerland, a reputed biologist. "He has discovered," said Chandrashekharan introducing him, "an insect that can live without food and water for 12 years, and has come to India for further researches in Biology."

"When you discover the secret at the back of it," said Gandhiji, "please pass it on to me."

"But," said the biologist, "I am a scientist and a monk also, and when I decided to come to pay my respect to you, I thought of asking you a question or two. May I do so?"

"With pleasure," said Gandhiji. Dr. Rahm was perplexed by the many warring creeds in the world and wondered if there was no way of ending the conflict.

"It depends on Christians," said Gandhiji, "if only they would make up their minds to unite with the others! But they will not do so. Their solution is universal acceptance of Christianity as they believe it. An English friend has been at me for the past thirty years trying to persuade



me that there is nothing but damnation in Hinduism and that I must accept Christianity. When I was in jail I got, from separate sources, no less than three copies of the *Life of Sister Therese*, in the hope that I should follow her example and accept Jesus as the only begotten son of God and my Saviour. I read the book prayerfully but I could not accept even St. Therese's testimony for myself. I must say I have an open mind, if indeed at this stage and age of my life I can be said to have an open mind on this question. Anyway I claim to have an open mind in this sense that if things were to happen to me as they did to Saul before he became Paul, I should not hesitate to be converted.

"But today I rebel against orthodox Christianity, as I am convinced that it has distorted the message of Jesus. He was an Asiatic whose message was delivered through many media and when it had the backing of a Roman Emperor it became an imperialist faith as it remains to this day. Of course there are noble but rare exceptions like Andrews and Elwin. But the general trend is as I have indicated.

"There was held the other day in Bombay a parliament of religions. Now a positive bar to a real parliament of religions is the refusal to accept an equal basis and a mutual regard for one another's faith. We must not forget that it is a parliament of *religions*, and not of a few religious-minded men. Did Christianity enter the parliament on a par with the others? When they do not do so openly, they secretly criticize us for our having many gods, forgetting that they have also many gods."

Dr. Rahm was not perhaps prepared for this reply. He made no answer. He put another question in reply. "If we cannot unite, can't we fight atheism which seems to be so much on the increase?"

Sir C. V. Raman who was sitting all this while as a passive listener now put in: "I shall answer your question. If there is a God we must look for Him in the universe. If He is not there, He is not worth looking for. I am being looked upon in various quarters as an atheist, but I am not. The growing discoveries in the science of astronomy and

physics seem to me to be further and further revelations of God. Mahatmaji, religions cannot unite. Science offers the best opportunity for a complete fellowship. All men of science are brothers.”

“What about the converse?” said Gandhiji. “All who are not men of science are not brothers?”

The distinguished physicist saw the joke and said: “But all can become men of science.” Then said Gandhiji, “You will have to present a *Kalma* of science as Islam presents one.”

“Science,” said Sir C. V. Raman, “is nothing but a search for truth—truth not only in the physical world, but in the world of logic, psychology, behaviour and so on. The virtue of a truly scientific frame of mind is the readiness to reject what is false and untrue. It proclaims from the house-tops that there is no virtue in sticking to untruth. I think the latest biological discovery is that there is no fundamental cleavage between the life of man and the life of the lower creation and that salvation lies in the perfection of the biological instinct for the perpetuation of race—the instinct to sacrifice the individual for the sake of the species.”

Several years ago a great religious-minded scientist, Dr. Henry Drummond, an F.R.S. like Sir C. V. Raman, had said the same thing in his book, *The Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. And does not the Gita teach the same thing? Does it not proclaim that with sacrifice God created man, and enjoined upon him sacrifice as the only means whereby to seek to grow?

*Harijan*, 30-5-'36, p. 121 at p. 122



## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

(From "Some Questions Answered")

I do believe in harmony between all religions. I have myself worked at it in my humble way....Belief in one God is the corner-stone of all religions. But I do not foresee a time when there would be only one religion on earth in practice. In theory, since there is one God, there can be only one religion. But in practice, no two persons I have known have had the same and identical conception of God. Therefore, there will, perhaps, always be different religions answering to different temperaments and climatic conditions. But I can clearly see the time coming when people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own. I think that we have to find unity in diversity....We are all children of one and the same God and, therefore, absolutely equal.

*Harijan*, 2-2-'34, p. 8

## A SYNTHESIS OF ALL RELIGIONS

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

### **Attitude to Christianity and Religion**

Dr. Crane, a distinguished clergyman from America, was here the other day, to visit Gandhiji. Born with a long military tradition behind him he had served in the last War, but left active service in the midst of it, as he could not stand the spectacle of a brother taking the life of a brother, and had since been hooted and mobbed as a pacifist. Dr. John Haynes Holmes' *New Wars for Old* had changed his outlook, and he had since consistently opposed war as a repudiation of Christianity. He was in Bombay on the Bakri-Id Day and had actually seen cows being slaughtered publicly. He had also been to a talkie—*Tukaram* and had seen a crowded Hindu audience applaud miracles.



He had travelled with a well-educated Hindu who had told him that he believed in miracles of that kind happening. He was puzzled and perplexed probably because he did not distinguish between these outward forms of belief and the heart of the particular religions he had come across. At basis were not all the three religions one, and were not the representatives of each denying them at every step?

He wanted to understand Gandhiji's attitude towards Christianity, as he had heard diverse representations made about it and he also wanted a simple statement regarding Gandhiji's attitude to religion in general.

"I shall certainly give you my reaction to Christianity," said Gandhiji. "Even when I was 18, I came in touch with good Christians in London. Before that I had come in touch with what I used then to call 'beef and beer-bottle Christianity', for these were regarded as the indispensable criteria of a man becoming a Christian, with also a third thing, namely, adoption of a European style of dress. Those Christians were parodying St. Paul's teaching—'Call thou nothing unclean'. I went to London, therefore, with that prejudice against Christianity. I came across good Christians there who placed the Bible in my hands. Then I met numerous Christians in South Africa, and I have since grown to this belief that Christianity is as good and as true a religion as my own. For a time I struggled with the question, 'Which was the true religion out of those I knew?' But ultimately I came to the deliberate conviction that there was no such thing as only one true religion and every other false. There is no religion that is absolutely perfect. All are equally imperfect or more or less perfect, hence the conclusion that Christianity is as good and true as my own religion. But so also about Islam or Zoroastrianism or Judaism.

"I, therefore, do not take as literally true that text that Jesus is the only begotten son of God. God cannot be the exclusive Father and I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster. Similarly I do not regard every word of the Bible as the inspired word of God even as I

do not regard every word of the Vedas or the Koran as inspired. The *sum total* of each of these books is certainly inspired, but I miss that inspiration in many of the things taken individually. The bible is as much a book of religion with me as the Gita and the Koran."

(With this he pointed to the two or three editions of the Koran with also a copy of the Bible lying on a bamboo-shelf in front of him. He had read numerous commentaries on the Bible, but had not read many commentaries on the Koran, and that is why there were more than one edition now in front of him.)

"Therefore," said he, "I am not interested in weaning you from Christianity and making you a Hindu, and I would not relish your designs upon me, if you had any, to convert me to Christianity! I would also dispute your claim that Christianity is the *only* true religion. It is *also* a true religion, a noble religion and along with other religions it has contributed to raise the moral height of mankind. But it has yet to make a greater contribution. After all what are 2,000 years in the life of a religion? Just now Christianity comes to yearning mankind in a tainted form. Fancy bishops supporting slaughter in the name of Christianity!"

### **In Case of Conflicting Teaching?**

"But," asked Dr. Crane, "when you say that all religions are true, what do you do when there are conflicting counsels?"

"I have no difficulty," said Gandhiji, "in hitting upon the truth, because I go by certain fundamental maxims. Truth is superior to everything and I reject what conflicts with it. Similarly that which is in conflict with non-violence should be rejected. And on matters which can be reasoned out, that which conflicts with reason must also be rejected."

"In matters which can be reasoned out?"

"Yes, there are subjects where reason cannot take us far and we have to accept things on faith. Faith then does not contradict reason but transcends it. Faith is a kind of sixth sense which works in cases which are without the purview of reason. Well then, given these three criteria, I can have no difficulty in examining all claims made on



behalf of religion. Thus to believe that Jesus is the only begotten son of God is to me against reason, for God can't marry and beget children. The word 'son' there can only be used in a figurative sense. In that sense everyone who stands in the position of Jesus is a begotten son of God. If a man is spiritually miles ahead of us we may say that he is in a special sense the son of God, though we are all children of God. We repudiate the relationship in our lives, whereas his life is a witness to that relationship."

### **Degrees of Divinity?**

"Then you will recognize degrees of divinity. Would you not say that Jesus was the most divine?"

"No, for the simple reason that we have no data. Historically we have more data about Mohammed than anyone else because he was more recent in time. For Jesus there is less data and still less for Buddha, Rama and Krishna; and when we know so little about them, is it not preposterous to say that one of them was more divine than another? In fact even if there were a great deal of data available, no judge should shoulder the burden of sifting all the evidence, if only for this reason that it requires a highly spiritual person to gauge the degree of divinity of the subjects he examines. To say that Jesus was 99 per cent divine, and Mohammed 50 per cent, and Krishna 10 per cent, is to arrogate to oneself a function which really does not belong to man."

"But," said Dr. Crane, "let us take a debatable point. Supposing I was debating between whether violence is justified or not. Mohammedanism would say one thing, Christianity another."

"Then I must decide with the help of the tests I have suggested."

"But does not Mohammed prescribe the use of the sword in certain circumstances?"

"I suppose most Muslims will agree. But I read religion in a different way. Khansaheb Abdul Gaffar Khan derives his belief in non-violence from the Koran, and the Bishop of London derives his belief in violence from the Bible. I derive my belief in non-violence from the Gita, whereas



there are others who read violence in it. But if the worst came to the worst and if I came to the conclusion that the Koran teaches violence, I would still reject violence, but I would not therefore say that the Bible is superior to the Koran or that Mohammed is inferior to Jesus. It is not my function to judge Mohammed and Jesus. It is enough that my non-violence is independent of the sanction of scriptures. But the fact remains that religious books have a hold upon mankind which other books have not. They have made a greater impression on me than Mark Twain or, to take a more appropriate instance, Emerson. Emerson was a thinker. Jesus and Mohammed were through and through men of action in a sense Emerson would never be. Their power was derived from their faith in God."

"I will take a concrete instance now to show what I mean," said Dr. Crane. "I was terribly shocked on Monday. I counted 37 cows slain on the streets by Muslims in the name of religion, and in offence to the Hindu sentiment. I asked the Hindu friend who travelled with me why the Muslims did so. He said it was part of their religion. 'Is it part of their spiritual growth?' I asked him. He said it was. I met a Musalman who said, 'We please both God and ourselves.' Now here was a Musalman revelling in a thing that outrages you and me too. Do you think all this is counter to the Koran?"

"I do indeed," said Gandhiji, and he referred Dr. Crane to the article he had written only last week. "Just as many Hindu practices, e.g. untouchability, are no part of Hindu religion, I say that cow-slaughter is no part of Islam. But I do not wrestle with the Muslims who believe that it is part of Islam."

### **These Conversions !**

"What do you say to the attempts to convert?"

"I strongly resent these overtures to utterly ignorant men. I can perhaps understand overtures made to me, as indeed they are being made. For they can reason with me and I can reason with them. But, I certainly resent the overtures made to Harijans. When a Christian preacher goes and says to a Harijan that Jesus was the only begotten

son of God, he will give him a blank stare. Then he holds out all kinds of inducements which debase Christianity.”

“Would you say a Harijan is not capable of reason?”

“He is, for instance, if you try to take work out of him without payment, he will not give it. He also has a sense of ethical values. But when you ask him to understand theological beliefs and categories he will not understand anything. I could not do so even when I was 17 and had a fair share of education and training. The orthodox Hindus have so horribly neglected the Harijan that it is astonishing how he adheres to the Hindu faith. Now I say it is outrageous for others to shake his faith.”

“What about a man who says he is commanded by God to do violence?”

“There you would not put another God before him. You need not disturb his religion, but you will disturb his reason.”

“But take Hitler. He says he is carrying out God’s behest in persecuting the Jews and killing his opponents.”

“You will not pit one word of God against another word of God. But you will have to bear down his reason. For him you will have to produce a miracle which you will do when Christians will learn the art of dying without killing in defence of what they hold dearer than religion. But we can go on arguing like this endlessly. And then I may tell you that you are talking against time.” And with this Gandhiji looked at the watch.

### **Gandhiji’s Religion**

“Just one question, then. Would you say then that your religion is a synthesis of all religions?”

“Yes, if you will. But I would call that synthesis Hinduism, and for you the synthesis will be Christianity. If I did not do so, you would always be patronizing me, as many Christians do now, saying, ‘How nice it would be if Gandhi accepted Christianity,’ and Muslims would be doing the same saying, ‘How nice it would be if Gandhi accepted Islam!’ That immediately puts a barrier between you and me. Do you see that?”

“I do.”



## RELIGIOUS COMMUNION BETWEEN MEN OF DIFFERENT FAITHS

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Dr. Ceresole walked one morning to Segaoon, wading through ankle-deep mud and had long talks with Gandhiji in his hut. He is a pilgrim to the Kingdom of Heaven and he loves to compare notes when he meets a kindred spirit like Gandhiji.

"Religion," he said, "which should bind us divides us. Is it not a sorry spectacle that whilst people of various denominations find no difficulty in working together all day in hearty co-operation, they must disband when the time for prayer comes? Is religion then meant to divide us? Must it be allowed to become an expression of conceit rather than of a desire to be of service?"

Dr. Ceresole thus did some loud thinking when he went to Segaoon one morning with two missionary ladies. "I want," he said, "some sort of religious communion between men of different faiths."

"Quite possible," said Gandhiji, "if there is no mental reservation."

"But a friend of mine, a great humanitarian worker," said Dr. Ceresole, "believes that but for evangelism he should not have taken up his mission work. He gets the driving power from communion with Jesus, he says, because Jesus was always in communion with God."

"The greatest trouble with us is," said Gandhiji, "not that a Christian missionary should rely on his own experience, but that he should dispute the evidence of a Hindu devotee's life. Just as he has his spiritual experience and the joy of communion, even so has a Hindu."

Dr. Ceresole seemed to have no doubt about this, and he said that the broadest view of Christianity seemed to him to have been presented by Frank Lenwood whose book *Jesus—Lord or Leader* deserved to be better known than it is. "He says he has the greatest respect for the



personality of Jesus, but he thought he might respectfully criticize him."

But the mention of mental reservation led the missionary visitors to raise the question of questions, so far as missionaries in India are concerned. "I have not had the time or desire to evangelize," one of them said. "The Church at home would be happy if through our hospital more people would be led to Christian lives."

"But whilst you give the medical help you expect the reward in the shape of your patients becoming Christians."

"Yes, the reward is expected. Otherwise there are many other places in the world which need our service. But instead of going there, we come here."

"There is the kink. At the back of your mind there is not pure service for its sake, but the result of service in the shape of many people coming to the Christian fold."

"In my own work there is no ulterior motive. I care for people, I alleviate pain, because I cannot do otherwise. The source of this is my loyalty to Jesus who ministered to suffering humanity. At the back of my mind there is, I admit, the desire that people may find the same joy in Jesus that I find. Where is the kink?"

"The kink is in the Church thinking that there are people in whom certain things are lacking and that you must supply them whether they want them or not. If you simply say to your patients, 'You have taken the medicine I gave you. Thank God. He has healed you. Don't come again,' you have done your duty. But if you also say, 'How nice it would be if you had the same faith in Christianity as I have,' you do not make of your medicine a free gift."

"But if I feel that I have something medically and spiritually which I can give, how can I keep it?"

"There is a way out of the difficulty. You must feel that what you possess, your patient also can possess but through a different route. You will say to yourself, 'I have come through this route, you may come through a different route.' Why should you want him to pass through your University and no other?"

"Because I have my partiality for my Alma Mater."

"There is my difficulty. Because you adore your mother, you cannot wish that all the rest were your mother's children."

"That is a physical impossibility."

"Then this one is a spiritual impossibility. God has the whole humanity as his children. How can I limit God's grace by my little mind and say that this is the only way?"

"I do not say it is the only way. There might be a better way."

"If you concede that there might be a better way, you have surrendered your point."

"Well, if you say that you have found your way, I am not so terrifically concerned with you. I will deal with one who is floundering in mud."

"Will you judge him? Have you people not floundered? Why will you present your particular brand of truth to all?"

"I must present to them the medicine I know."

"Then you will say to him, 'Have you seen your own doctor?' You will send him to his doctor, ask the doctor to take charge of him. You will perhaps consult that doctor, you will discuss with him the diagnosis, and will convince him or allow yourself to be convinced by him. But there you are dealing with a wretched physical thing. Here we are dealing with a spiritual thing where you cannot go through all these necessary investigations. What I plead for is humanity. You do not claim freedom from hypocrisy for the Christian Church?"

Dr. Ceresole: "Most of us believe our religion to be the best and they have not the slightest idea of what other religions have revealed to their adherents. Dr.———has made a careful study of the Hindu scriptures, and he has observed what Hinduism gives to the Hindus."

"I say it is not enough for him to read the *Song Celestial* or the Koran. It is necessary for him to read the Koran with Islamic spectacles and the Gita with Hindu spectacles, just as he would expect me to read the Bible with Christian spectacles. I would ask him: 'Have you read the Gita as reverently as I have or even as reverently as I have read the Bible?' I tell you I have not read as many books on Hinduism as I have about Christianity. And yet I did



not come to the conclusion that Christianity or Hinduism was the only way.”

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But then wondered the missionary friends, what exactly should be the missionaries' attitude?

“I think,” said Gandhiji, “I have made it clear. But I shall say it again in other words: Just to forget that you have come to a country of heathens, and to think that they are as much in search of God as you are; just to feel that you are not going there to give your spiritual goods to them, but that you will share your worldly goods of which you have a good stock. You will then do your work without a mental reservation and thereby you will share your spiritual treasures. The knowledge that you have this reservation creates a barrier between you and me.”

“Do you think that because of what you call the mental reservation, the work that one could accomplish would suffer?”

“I am sure. You would not be half as useful as you would be without the reservation. The reservation means that you belong to a different and a higher species, and you make yourself inaccessible to others.”

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“You have not examined all religious beliefs. But even if you had, you may not claim infallibility. You assume knowledge of all people, which you can do only if you were God. I want you to understand that you are labouring under a double fallacy: That what you think is best for you is really so; and that what you regard as the best for you is the best for the whole world. It is an assumption of omniscience and infallibility. I plead for a little humility.”

*Harijan*, 18-7-'36, p. 177 at p. 178



## INTER-RELIGIOUS STUDIES

(From "Diary of Gandhiji's Calcutta Visit")

*Q.*: Why do you ask the Hindus to study the Koran also? Is it not enough if they study their own religion?

*Replying Gandhiji said:*

"It is the duty of everyone to study the scriptures of religions other than his own. This enables people to keep their religion pure and rid it of blemishes. Moreover, we have Christians, Muslims, Parsis and followers of other religions amongst us. It behoves the Hindus to study their religious books if they regard them as their brothers."

*Harijan*, 25-5-'47, p. 165 at p. 166

## THE DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION OF HINDUISM TO INDIAN LIFE

(The following extract is taken from the account of the conversation between Gandhiji and Mr. John Mott, founder of Y. M. C. A. movement, which appeared from the pen of Shri Pyarelal under the title "Under the Starry Sky".)

The most distinctive and the largest contribution of Hinduism to India's culture is the doctrine of Ahimsa. It has given a definite bias to the history of the country for the last three thousand years and over and it has not ceased to be a living force in the lives of India's millions even today. It is a growing doctrine, its message is still being delivered. Its teaching has so far permeated our people that an armed revolution has almost become an impossibility in India, not because as some would have it, we as a race are physically weak, for it does not require much physical strength so much, as a devilish will to press a trigger to shoot a person, but because the tradition of Ahimsa has struck deep root among the people.

*Young India*, 21-3-'29, p. 95

## THE DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION OF ISLAM TO INDIAN LIFE

(The following extract is taken from the account of the conversation between Gandhiji and Mr. John Mott, founder of Y. M. C. A. movement, which appeared from the pen of Shri Pyarelal under the title "Under the Starry Sky".)

Referring to Islam he (Gandhiji) mentioned as its distinctive contribution to India's national culture, "its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God and a practical application of the truth of the brotherhood of man for those who are nominally within its fold. I call these two distinctive contributions. For in Hinduism the spirit of brotherhood has become too much philosophized. Similarly though philosophical Hinduism has no other god but God, it cannot be denied that practical Hinduism is not so emphatically uncompromising as Islam."

*Young India*, 21-3-'29, p. 95

## THE DISTINCTIVE CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIANITY TO INDIAN LIFE

(The following extract is taken from the account of the conversation between Gandhiji and Mr. John Mott, founder of Y. M. C. A. movement, which appeared from the pen of Shri Pyarelal under the title "Under the Starry Sky".)

*Mott*: What then is the contribution of Christianity to the national life of India? I mean the influence of Christ as apart from Christianity, for I am afraid, there is a wide gulf separating the two at present.

*Gandhiji*: Aye, there lies the rule. It is not possible to consider the teaching of a religious teacher apart from the lives of his followers. Unfortunately, Christianity in India has been inextricably mixed up for the last one hundred and fifty years with the British rule. It appears to us as synonymous with materialistic civilization and

imperialistic exploitation by the stronger white races of the weaker races of the world. Its contribution to India has been, therefore, largely of a negative character. It has done some good in spite of its professors. It has shocked us into setting our own house in order. Christian missionary literature has drawn pointed attention to some of our abuses and set us athinking.

*Young India*, 21-3-'29, p. 95



## SECTION TWO : RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

19

### RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE .

#### I

(Weekly letter to the inmates of the Ashram at Sabarmati, written from Yeravda Central Prison in 1930.)

I do not like the word tolerance, but could not think of a better one. Tolerance may imply a gratuitous assumption of the inferiority of other faiths to one's own, whereas Ahimsa teaches us to entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as we accord to our own, thus admitting the imperfection of the latter. This admission will be readily made by a seeker of Truth, who follows the law of Love. If we had attained the full vision of Truth, we would no longer be mere seekers, but would have become one with God, for Truth is God. But being only seekers, we prosecute our quest, and are conscious of our imperfection. And if we are imperfect ourselves, religion as conceived by us must also be imperfect. We have not realized religion in its perfection, even as we have not realized God. Religion of our conception, being thus imperfect, is always subject to a process of evolution and re-interpretation. Progress towards Truth, towards God, is possible only because of such evolution. And if all faiths outlined by men are imperfect, the question of comparative merit does not arise. All faiths constitute a revelation of Truth, but all are imperfect, and liable to error. Reverence for other faiths need not blind us to their faults. We must be keenly alive to the defects of our own faith also, yet not leave it on that account, but try to overcome those defects. Looking at all religions with an equal eye, we would not only not hesitate, but would think it our duty, to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths.

The question then arises: Why should there be so many different faiths? The Soul is one, but the bodies which She animates are many. We cannot reduce the number of bodies; yet we recognize the unity of the Soul. Even as a tree has a single trunk, but many branches and leaves, so is there one true and perfect Religion, but it becomes many, as it passes through the human medium. The one Religion is beyond all speech. Imperfect men put it into such language as they can command, and their words are interpreted by other men equally imperfect. Whose interpretation is to be held to be the right one? Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent and purer love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight, which is as far from fanaticism as the north pole from the south. True knowledge of religion breaks down the barriers between faith and faith. Cultivation of tolerance for other faiths will impart to us a truer understanding of our own.

Tolerance obviously does not disturb the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil. The reference here throughout is naturally to the principal faiths of the world. They are all based on common fundamentals. They have all produced great saints.

I would linger yet a while on tolerance. My meaning will perhaps become clearer, if I describe here some of my experiences. In Phoenix we had our daily prayers in the same way as in Sabarmati, and Musalmans as well as Christians attended them along with Hindus. The late Sheth Rustomji and his children too frequented the prayer meetings. Rustomji Sheth very much liked the Gujarati *bhajan*, '*Mane valun*',—'Dear, dear to me is the name of Rama.' If my memory serves me right, Maganlal or Kashi was once leading us in singing this hymn, when Rustomji Sheth exclaimed joyously, "Say the name of Hormazd instead of name of Rama. His suggestion was readily taken up, and after that whenever the Sheth was present, and sometimes even when he was not, we put in the name of



Hormazd in place of Rama. The late Husain, son of Daud Sheth, often stayed at the Phoenix Ashram, and enthusiastically joined our prayers. To the accompaniment of an organ, he used to sing in a very sweet voice the song '*Hai bahare bagh*',—'The garden of this world has only a momentary bloom.' He taught us all this song, which we also sang at prayers. Its inclusion in our *Bhajanavali* is a tribute to truth-loving Husain's memory. I have never met a young man who practised Truth more devotedly than Husain. Joseph Royeppen often came to Phoenix. He is a Christian, and his favourite hymn was '*Vaishnava jana*',—'He is a *Vaishnava* (servant of the Lord), who succours people in distress.' He loved music and once sang this hymn saying 'Christian' in place of '*Vaishnava*'. The others accepted his reading with alacrity, and I observed that this filled Joseph's heart with joy.

When I was turning over the pages of the sacred books of different faiths for my own satisfaction, I became sufficiently familiar for my purpose with Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Hinduism. In reading these texts, I can say, that I was equiminded towards all these faiths, although perhaps I was not then conscious of it. Refreshing my memory of those days, I do not find I ever had the slightest desire to criticize any of those religions merely because they were not my own, but read each sacred book in a spirit of reverence, and found the same fundamental morality in each. Some things I did not understand then, and do not understand even now, but experience has taught me, that it is a mistake hastily to imagine, that anything that we cannot understand is necessarily wrong. Some things which I did not understand first have since become as clear as daylight. Equimindedness helps us to solve many difficulties and even when we criticize anything, we express ourselves with a humility and a courtesy, which leave no sting behind them.

The acceptance of the doctrine of Equality of Religions does not abolish the distinction between religion and irreligion. We do not propose to cultivate toleration for irreligion. That being so, some people might object that there would be no room left for equimindedness, if every one



took his own decision as to what was religion and what was irreligion. If we follow the law of love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him, and therefore either we shall bring him to see the error of his ways, or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the law of Love, he may be violent to us. If however we cherish real love for him it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule, that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person.

*From Yeravda Mandir, (1957), chapters X and XI*

## II

(From comments in "Notes" which appeared under the title "How Do You Pray?")

For me all the principal religions are equal in the sense that they are all true. They are supplying a felt want in the spiritual progress of humanity. Hence I have had no difficulty in bringing up Muslim, Parsi and Christian children under my care in their own faith. Indeed, I had to study some literature for their sake when their parents wanted me to teach them particular forms of worship according to special books.

*Harijan, 6-4-'34, p. 59*

## MINE IS NOT A RELIGION OF THE PRISON HOUSE

(From "Notes")

I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as free as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. I refuse to live in other people's houses as an interloper, a beggar or a slave. . . . Mine is not a religion of the prison house. It has room for the least among God's creation. But it is proof against insolence, pride of race, religion or colour.

*Young India*, 1-6-'21, p. 169 at p. 170

## WHY HOSTILITY ?

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Difference of opinion should never mean hostility. If they did, my wife and I should be sworn enemies of one another. I do not know two persons in the world who had no difference of opinion, and as I am a follower of the Gita, I have always attempted to regard those who differ from me with the same affection as I have for my nearest and dearest.

*Young India*, 17-3-'27, p. 82

## THE CORRECT ATTITUDE

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

It is customary to decry other religions and to offer their own as the only one that can bring deliverance. That attitude should be radically changed. Let them appear before the people as they are, and try to rejoice in seeing Hindus become better Hindus and Muslims better Muslims.

*Young India*, 14-7-'27, p. 229 at p. 231

## A PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

The last thing he (Gandhiji) referred to was a letter from a Muslim who described himself as a Sufi. He had sent this communication through Shaheed Saheb. The purport was that in his opinion there was nothing common between Hinduism and Islam and that the two could not be as if they were one. For, he argued that the Hindus did not believe in one and only God but held cows and goats as superior to man and believed in high and low, whereas Islam was a brotherhood in which there was no hierarchy and which believed in one God as Allah. In this there was a caricature of Hinduism. There was no Hindu who put animals, the cow and the goat, before man. But he submitted that if anyone like him believed himself to be the lowest in God's creation, there was nothing wrong. It was a sign of true humility. He held that every Hindu believed in one and only God. He admitted that excrescences had grown round Hinduism and that its votaries had not always been true to Hinduism undefiled. It was, therefore, up to an impartial man to understand Hinduism as its votaries like him understood it, just as it was the duty of an impartial Hindu to understand Islam as a good Muslim understood it. That he held, was the safest rule of interpretation for any faith. Then it would be found that all great religions sprung from the same source and the fundamentals were common to them all.

*Harijan*, 7-9-'47, p. 309 at p. 310



## THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

(Originally appeared in the article entitled "Ceylon Memories" by M. D.)

I propose to put together here some of the things I could not include in my weekly letters. It is generally known now that Christian missionaries everywhere seek Gandhiji out to have a talk with him on things of the spirit. But very rarely does one raise a question — like Mr. De Boer at Vellore did — as to what exactly Gandhiji means by 'things of the spirit' and why. Sometimes one gets an impression as though they delighted in riddling him with questions like those that a Protestant might put to a Jesuit or vice versa and as a result they get more confounded than ever.

To turn to some of the questions. Just as a Protestant would ask a Jesuit as to what he meant by the doctrine of obedience, a friend at the Colombo meeting asked what Gandhiji thought of the possibility of the forgiveness of sin. Gandhiji explained at length how there could be no forgiveness like the forgiveness that a criminal prays for and gets from an earthly king. It was a question of a change of heart brought about by true contrition and ceaseless striving for purification. In this connection Gandhiji referred to the case of the Plymouth Brother whom he has himself made historic by a detailed reference in the *Autobiography*. "But the Plymouth Brother I met," said Gandhiji, "argued that there was no such thing as human effort. If you accept the fact of crucifixion, sinfulness would go altogether. I was astounded as I knew and was intimate with quite a number of Christian friends who were making a definite effort. 'Don't you fall?' I asked him. 'Yes,' he said, 'but my strength comes from the fact that Jesus intercedes for me and washes my sins away.' Well, I tell you, the Quaker friend who had introduced me to the Plymouth Brother, felt no less astounded. Asking for forgiveness means we should not sin again, and the grant

of forgiveness means that we would have power to resist all temptation. It is only after a persistent, untiring effort that God comes to our rescue as a wall of protection and there is a growing consciousness that we shall not sin. In a famous controversy with Huxley, I remember Gladstone having said that when the definite grace of God was pledged to us we became incapable of sin. Jesus was incapable of sin from birth, Gladstone said, but we could be such by constant striving. So long as there is a single evil thought coming to our mind, we must conclude that there is not complete forgiveness or grace."

Another friend wondered if Gandhiji's position in matters of faith was not like living in a sort of half-way house.

"I certainly admire the friend who made that criticism" said Gandhiji, "but he may be sure that there is no half-way house for me. I have been described as an intolerable wholehogger. I know that friends get confused when I say I am a Sanatanist Hindu and they fail to find in me things they associate with a man usually labelled as such. But that is because in spite of my being a staunch Hindu I find room in my faith for Christian and Islamic and Zoroastrian teaching, and therefore my Hinduism *seems* to some to be a conglomeration and some have even dubbed me an eclectic. Well, to call a man eclectic is to say that he has no faith, but mine is a broad faith which does not oppose Christians, — not even a Plymouth Brother—, not even the most fanatical Musalman. It is a faith based on the broadest possible toleration. I refuse to abuse a man for his fanatical deeds, because I try to see them from his point of view. It is that broad faith that sustains me. It is a somewhat embarrassing position, I know, but to others, not to me !"

At another meeting of the missionaries (at Jaffna) he developed this last thought, in reply to a question as to what he would wish India to be like in matters of religion. He reiterated his impatience with the missionary or the Musalman who thinks of getting hold of the untouchable for the sake of increasing his flock, and said that like the Dewan of Mysore he would ask them all to strive to make



the untouchables better Hindus if they could. "I should love," he said, "all the men,—not only in India but in the world,—belonging to the different faiths, to become better people by contact with one another, and if that happens, the world will be a much better place to live in than it is today. I plead for the broadest toleration, and I am working to that end. I ask people to examine every religion from the point of the religionists themselves. I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e. to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian, or wholly Musalman, but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another."

One of the missionary friends wanted to know how the Gita and the New Testament compared as sources of comfort so far as Gandhiji was concerned, and instead of giving a bold answer that he derived all the comfort that he needed from the Bhagavadgita he retold the story of the beginnings of his religious studies in England, with which the readers of the *Autobiography* are in the main familiar. All missionaries seem to forget that the men they approach with their gospel have their own traditions and their own religion which sustain them from generation to generation. Gandhiji told these friends that when he read the Sermon on the Mount he read nothing new, but found in it, vividly told, what he had learnt in his childhood: 'There is nothing much in giving a cup of water to one who gave you a cup of water, or saluting one who salutes you, but there is some virtue in doing a good turn to one who had done you a bad turn.' "I have not been able to see," he said, "any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavadgita. What the Sermon describes in a graphic manner, the Bhagavadgita reduces to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the accepted sense of the term, but it has argued out the law of love—the law of abandon as I would call it—in a scientific manner. The Sermon on the Mount gives the same law in wonderful language. The New Testament gave me comfort and boundless joy, as it came after the repulsion that parts of the Old had given me. Today supposing I was deprived of the Gita and forgot all its contents but had a copy o



the Sermon, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the Gita."

And as though summing up the argument with a great warning, he said, "You know there is one thing in me and that is I love to see the bright side of things and not the seamy side, and so I can derive comfort and inspiration from any great book of any great religion. I may not be able to reproduce a single verse from the Gita or the New Testament, a Hindu child or Christian child may be able to repeat the verses better, but those clever children cannot deprive me of the assimilation that is in me today of the spirit of the two books."

*Young India*, 22-12-'27, p. 425

## 25

### THE NEED FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERATION

(Originally appeared under the title "Religion of Volunteers")

After showing that in this land of many religions, a volunteer is hard put to it to find a common denominator of conduct, a correspondent thus eloquently describes the religion of a volunteer:

"The Religion of the Volunteer does not stand on a par with the denominational religions, just as unquestionably, Truth does not stand on a par with them. All the religions inculcate Truth, have as their essence Truth; but Truth is not of a piece with those religions. It is not one among those religions, but it is *the* Religion over and above all minor religions, their acknowledged Lord and Superior. If only the Truth at the bottom of the several religions of the world be fully recognized and assimilated, that very moment the conflict between the various religions will disappear and the bloody scenes that are now and then enacted in the name of religion, will have their final quietus. It is this Truth, the Religion of religions, which inevitably commands instantaneous, universal assent and allegiance of mankind when it is understood, though surely they would not for a moment brook their conversion to any other faith. But this sort of conversion, this letting in a flood of light and dispelling of darkness, this clearing up of vision, everyone hails and longs for from the depth of his heart. A Hindu would

not like actual conversion to Islam, but he would, most surely, be always ready to greedily imbibe the Truth that may be embedded in it. If ever the dream of bringing the whole world under one religion is to be realized it can only be by establishing the sovereignty of Truth as the world-religion. The religion of the Volunteer is none other than Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth, and it is not too much to expect mankind voluntarily to submit to its sway. This being made clear, we must next inquire into the profound effects which Truth will have on its devotee. It will be as if a chronic disease of a very long standing, inherited or acquired, has been healed; as if the blind man has been given back his sight; as if the cripple has been enabled to walk; and the impotent again blessed with his manhood. Truth will not only illumine the darkness of the soul of its devotee, but will light up his body also. The soul has been called the 'eye of the body', and if it is filled with Truth or Light, it shall see clearly and will itself become light and guide the body properly.

Jesus says: 'The light of the body is the eye; therefore, when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light, but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.' "

Stripped of the eloquence, this religion of Truth again resolves itself into its component parts Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc. For Truth will appear to most sincere and conscientious Hindus, Musalmans and Christians as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity respectively as they believe them.

The golden rule of conduct, therefore, is mutual toleration seeing that we will never all think alike and that we shall always see Truth in fragment and from different angles of vision. Conscience is not the same thing for all. Whilst, therefore, it is a good guide for individual conduct, imposition of that conduct upon all will be an insufferable interference with everybody else's freedom of conscience. It is a much abused term. Have all people a conscience? Has a cannibal a conscience? Must he be allowed to act according to the dictates of his conscience which tells him that it is his duty to kill and eat his fellows? Now the etymological meaning of 'conscience' is 'true knowledge'.



The dictionary meaning is 'faculty distinguishing between right and wrong and influencing conduct accordingly'. Possession of such a faculty is possible only for a trained person, that is one who has undergone discipline and learnt to listen to the inner voice. But even amongst the most conscientious persons, there will be room enough for honest differences of opinion. The only possible rule of conduct in any civilized society is therefore mutual toleration. It can be inculcated among and practised by all irrespective of their status and training.

*Young India*, 23-9-'26, p. 333

## 26

### TOLERATION IN MATTERS RELIGIOUS

(Originally appeared under the title "Sindh Bans *Satyartha Prakash*")

One had thought that the ban on *Satyartha Prakash* had lapsed, never to be renewed. But the hope was a dupe. Here is the renewed ban :

"Whereas it appears to the Government of Sindh that Chapter XIV of the book in Sindhi entitled *Satyartha Prakash* contains matters which promotes feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of His Majesty's subjects —

"Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 99A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, the Government of Sindh hereby declares to be forfeited to His Majesty every copy wherever found of the book in Sindhi entitled *Satyartha Prakash* written by Swami Dayananda Saraswati and published by Professor Tarachand D. Gajra, M.A. on behalf of the Pratinidhi Sabha, Sindh, Karachi, and all other documents containing copies, reprints or translations of, or extracts from Chapter XIV of the said book on the grounds that in the said chapter the author,

- (a) ridicules some of the religious beliefs of the Muslims;
- (b) misrepresents and reviles the teachings of the Koran;
- (c) attacks and belittles the authority of the Prophet Mohammed; and
- (d) generally contains matters calculated to hurt and which hurts the religious susceptibilities of Muslims."



It is wider in application than before. The lapsed ban made it criminal to print or publish the book containing Chapter XIV. The renewed ban makes the possession of such a copy a crime. I cannot help feeling that the ban is senseless and is calculated to wound the susceptibilities of the Arya Samajists all the world over. *Satyartha Prakash* enjoys the same status for 40 lakhs of Arya Samajists as the Koran for the Muslims and the Bible for the Christians. It is possible to understand a ban on contemporaneous controversial literature, though at this time of the day popular Governments are reluctant even then to use their power. But it seems to be mischievous to ban a scriptural book. I would, therefore, urge the Sindh Government to withdraw the ban in question. The Sindhi translation of *Satyartha Prakash* is not a new publication. Is it to be contended that a book that has passed through so many editions and has been translated in most of the languages of the world has been now found to contain matter "which promotes feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of His Majesty's subjects"? The virtue of toleration is never strained, especially in matters of religion. Differences of religious opinion will persist to the end of time; toleration is the only thing that will enable persons belonging to different religions to live as good neighbours and friends. Religion never suffers by reason of the criticism fair or foul of critics; it always suffers from the laxity or indifference of its followers.

*Harijan*, 3-11-'46, p. 383

## WHAT DOES TOLERANCE IMPLY ?

(From "Freedom of Expression")

It will not be denied that to say what offends another is against ethics and certainly against spirituality if the saying is not required in the interest of truth. . . . Whilst I think that such comparisons\* are undesirable, I admit that to object to them when they are actually made may be a mark of intolerance. . . . We would but feed the fire of intolerance if we insist, in the name of freedom of opinion, on expressing those opinions which are likely to wound some. . . . What I plead for is extreme and delicate consideration for the feelings and susceptibilities of others. If in the name of tolerance we began to swear at one another's deities, we would be copying the fabled economist who killed the goose that laid the golden eggs.

*Young India*, 24-4-'24, p. 135

## EXTREME INTOLERANCE

(Originally appeared under the title "Rowdyism Run Riot")

A correspondent from Jabalpur describes the rowdyism exhibited by a section of the Hindus at a benefit performance in aid of the local convent school for girls. A Hindu friend actually organized the show. The actors in the little drama were all girls from the convent. Towards the end there was a scene in which an orphaned girl, tired of the world, was praying to God. Angels appeared and advised her to have faith in her Christ and the play ended with a hymn in praise of Jesus. This was the signal for pandemonium. The Hindus who created the disturbance raised a hue and cry against Christianity, the organizer who tried to speak was unable to make himself heard and money for the tickets was demanded back. The writer asks whether

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\*viz. by Gandhiji with Prophets—Jesus Christ, Rama, Krishna etc.

this scene could have taken place if the hymn sung had been in praise of Shri Krishna instead of Jesus.

If what the correspondent says is true, the behaviour described was wholly unworthy. It betrayed extreme intolerance. Those who do not like things that do not coincide with their notions need not patronize them but it is ungentlemanly to behave like less than men when things are not to their taste.

*Harijan*, 13-10-'46, p. 347

## 29

## THE MALADY OF INTOLERANCE

(From "Another Delhi Interlude")

The prayer meeting began today as usual. When the verses from the Koran were being recited a member of the audience objected to the recitation. He was arrested by the policeman but Gandhiji immediately stopped the prayer, and requested the policeman who had arrested him to set him free:

He would be ashamed to pray, he said, where a man had been arrested for doing what he had done. He would leave the place, he said only if he were requested to do so by the Mehtars. He would not wait even to consult the trustees as they were after all the trustees of the Mehtars.

Shri G. L. Thatte, General Secretary of the Anti-Pakistan Front was arrested today outside the Valmiki Temple just before Gandhiji came out for the evening prayers.

Earlier in the day Shri Thatte had sent a letter to Gandhiji informing him of his intention to object to the recitation of the verses from the Koran at the prayer.

Another person was arrested a little later when he took exception to the recitation of Koranic verses during the prayers and shouted *Hindu Dharmaki Jay*. Gandhiji then discontinued the prayers.

Gandhiji requested the police to set the man free as it put him (Gandhiji) to shame if anybody was arrested for objecting to what he did.



Gandhiji deplored such narrow-mindedness on the part of the people. Mere shouting of slogans would not carry Hinduism anywhere, he said. He was at a loss to understand why some Hindus objected to his reading the Koran verses in his prayer. If at places the Muslims had not behaved as they should, then it did not mean that the Hindus should retaliate by opposing the reading of the Koran.

The verse from the Koran that was being recited, Gandhiji said, was a mighty prayer in praise of God. How did it harm the Hindu religion if the prayer was recited in the Arabic language ? He who said so knew neither his religion nor his duty. That prayer could also be recited in a temple.

He had been told by a friend that a prayer with the same meaning was also found in the Yajurveda. Those who had studied the Hindu scriptures knew that among the 108 Upanishads there was one called the Allopanishad. Did not the man who wrote it know his religion ? It was said that Guru Nanak himself went to Arabia in search of truth during his religious wanderings.

No religion in the world, Gandhiji continued, could live without self-suffering. A faith gained in strength only when people were willing to lay down their lives for it. The tree of life had to be watered with the blood of martyrs, who had laid down their lives without killing their opponents or intending any harm to them. That was the root of Hinduism and of all other religions.

*Harijan*, 11-5-'47, p. 147

## A WORD TO OBJECTORS

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

As one person in the audience objected to the *Al Fateha* being recited, prayers were not held on the Birla House lawn. Gandhiji, however, addressed the audience. He said that he was not going to argue with the objector. He realized the anger that raged in people's hearts today. The atmosphere was so surcharged that he thought it right to respect even one objector, but this by no means meant that he gave up God or His worship in his heart. Prayer demanded a pure atmosphere. One thing that everyone should take to heart from such objections was that those who were anxious to serve must have endless patience and tolerance. One must never seek to impose one's views on others.

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Though I believe that I was wise in having yielded to a solitary objector and refrained from holding public prayer, it is not improper to examine the incident a little more fully. The prayer was public only in the sense that no member of the public was debarred from attending it. It was on private premises. Propriety required that those only should attend who believed whole-heartedly in the prayer including verses from the Koran. Indeed the rule should be applicable to prayer held even on public grounds. A prayer meeting is not a debating assembly. It is possible to conceive prayer meetings of many communities on the same plot of land. Decency requires that those who are opposed to particular prayers would abstain from attending the meetings they object to. The reverse would make any meeting impossible without disturbance. Freedom of worship, even of public speech, would become a farce if interference became the order of the day. In decent society the exercise of this elementary right should not need the protection of the bayonet. It should command universal acceptance.

*Harijan*, 5-10-'47, p. 353



## ILL-INFORMED OBJECTORS

(From "Gandhiji's Post-Prayer Speeches")

This evening when as usual before the prayer meeting the audience was asked if there was any objector to the Koran verses being recited as part of the prayer, one member spoke up and persisted in his objection. Gandhiji had made it clear that if there was such objection, he would neither have public prayer nor the after-prayer speech on current events. Consequently, he sent word that there would be neither prayer nor speech before the public. But the gathering would not disperse without seeing Gandhiji. He, therefore, went to the rostrum and said a few words on the reason for abstention and the working of Ahimsa as he understood it. He said that it was unseemly for anyone to object to the prayer especially, when it was on a private lawn. Nevertheless, his Ahimsa warned him against disregarding even one objector when an overwhelming majority were likely to overawe one person into silence. It would be otherwise if the whole audience objected. It would then be his duty to have the prayer even at the risk of being molested. There was also the further consideration that the majority should not be disappointed for the sake of one objector. The remedy was simple. If the majority restrained themselves and entertained no anger against, or evil design on, the solitary objector, it would be his duty to hold the prayer. The possibility, however, was that if the whole audience was non-violent in intention and action, the objector would restrain himself. Such, he held, was the working of non-violence. . . .

Shri Brij Krishnaji had reported that there was a much larger audience than usual and about ten objectors to recitation from the Koran. . . . The objectors were perfectly restrained and courteous. Gandhiji was also told that there was a suppressed objection from a much larger number. Gandhiji, before proceeding with the prayer spoke to the meeting. He said he was glad that the people



were open enough to register their objection. He did not like to think that people came not to share the worship of God but they came to see him or hear him because he was called a Mahatma or because of his long service of the nation. The prayer was all-inclusive. God was known by many names. In the last analysis the names were as many as human beings. It was rightly said that even animals, birds and stones adored God. They would find in the *Bhajanavali* a hymn by a Muslim saint which said that the chirp of birds in the morning and evening signified that they adored their Maker. There was no sense in objecting to any part of the prayer because it was selected from the Koran or from any other scripture. Whatever might be the shortcomings of certain Muslims (no matter what their number was), the objection could not apply to a whole community much less to the Prophet or any other or his message. He, the speaker, had gone through the whole of the Koran. He had gained by it, not lost by it. He felt that he was a better Hindu for the reading of the world's scriptural books. He knew that there were hostile critics of the Koran. A friend from Bombay who had many Muslim friends had put before him a conundrum. What was the teaching of the Prophet about the Kafirs? Were not the Hindus Kafirs according to the Koran? He had long come to the conclusion that they were not. But he spoke to his Muslim friends about the matter. They spoke from knowledge. They assured him that Kafir in the Koran meant a non-believer. They said that the Hindus were not because they believed in one God. If they went by what the hostile critics said, they would condemn the Koran and the Prophet as they would condemn Krishna who was depicted as a dissolute being having sixteen hundred *gopis*. He silenced his critics by saying that his Krishna was immaculate. He would never bow his head before a rake. The God they worshipped with him every evening was in everyone and was all powerful. Therefore, they could have no enemy and they could fear none because God was in them and by them every moment. Such being the nature of the congregational worship, he would prefer to have no such worship if they could not with their whole heart and

without reservation join the prayer. If they could, they would find that they daily gathered strength to enable them to dispel the darkness that surrounded them. On Gandhiji asking the audience frankly and fearlessly to express their opinion, they lustily said that they wanted the prayer and if there was an interruption they would bear no anger or malice against the objectors. The prayer then went on in the usual manner.

*Harijan*, 9-11-'47, p. 399 at pp. 406-407.

## 32

### A HALF-TRUTH

(From "Gandhiji's Post-Prayer Speeches")

Before he commenced his prayers Gandhiji said that though no one, except the courteous old friend who had registered his usual objection, had got up to object to the recitation from the Koran, he proposed to deal with a very pathetic letter of objection received from a Punjabi Hindu refugee who had suffered much. He did not know whether the objector was present at the meeting or not. . . . The letter was written in the Urdu script. He had asked Shri Brij Krishnaji to note down the points of the letter.

The first was the charge of breach of his (Gandhiji's) word. Had he not said that if there was even one objector at his prayer meetings, he would respect the objection and not lead public prayer for the evening in question? This was a half-truth, more dangerous than full untruth. When he stopped the prayer meeting for the first time, he had announced that he suspended it for fear that the overwhelming majority of the audience might resent the objection even to the point of molesting the objector. This was several months ago. Since then the audience had learnt the art of self-restraint and when he got the assurance from the audience that they would harbour neither resentment nor anger in their hearts, he consented again to lead public prayer. The result was happy as he knew. The objectors were strictly courteous in their behaviour and beyond registering their objection they did nothing to interfere with



the prayer. He hoped, therefore, that the writer of the letter would see that there was not only no breach but that the result so far had been quite happy. He assured the audience that so far as he knew himself, he had not been guilty of any such breach throughout his long life of public service.

The writer of the letter then taxed him for reciting some verses from the Koran when he did not do so with reference to the Japji or the Bible. Here, too, the writer betrayed ignorance of the description he had given as to how the whole of the prayer verses had been adopted. He had already pointed out that very often *bhajans* were taken from the Bible as well as the Granth Saheb.

*Harijan*, 16-11-'47, p. 409

### 33

#### MY CRIME OF INTERPRETING KORAN !

(Originally appeared under the title "I Wonder")

"For sometime you seem to have made it a point to strengthen your arguments in favour of non-violence by frequent but invariably vague references to the Holy Koran and the teachings of Islam. It is quite obvious that you only seek to impress the Muslims thereby. No doubt your right to preach your cherished doctrine is beyond all question. Similarly, it is quite understandable that you should pat the fifth columnist Musalmans like Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Abul Kalam Azad on the back. But can't you realize that nothing can offend the religious susceptibilities of a Musalman more than to see a non-Muslim citing the scripture for his own purpose? Well, the Musalmans have had thirteen centuries to know what the Koran teaches and to practise what it means. The Muslims, of course, do not need a Mahatma to interpret their own holy book. It would be better, indeed, if you take it from the Muslims what they have, throughout the last thirteen centuries, believed to be the teachings of their religion, rather than indulge in your own wishful interpretation. I hope you realize full well that you as well as your Muslim satellites have entirely forfeited the confidence of the Musalmans. Your references to the Koran are futile except that they cause the greatest provocation



to the Muslims. Muslims have always shown themselves self-respecting enough not to allow their holy book becoming an instrument in non-Muslim hands. Your flattering words about Islam are of no avail. The fact stands out that you are a non-Muslim. Hence the Koran cannot be the source of your ideas or ideals. You only turn to the Koran afterwards in order to popularize them among the Muslims. It is my friendly advice to you to stop forthwith all reference to the Koran. In the meantime, I would ask you to read what Abul Kalam Azad wrote before he reconciled himself to be the Quisling of Muslim India."

This letter is from an M.A.(Aligarh). He is a research scholar in the Muslim University. The letter was received some time ago. I kept it in my file so long, for I was debating whether it would serve the cause of unity to publish it. But having received another from the same friend more unbalanced than this one, I decided to publish the foregoing in order to enable me to expostulate with those who in Aligarh or outside hold views similar to the writer's.

I have sweet memories of Aligarh. I have more than once visited the great University. I have still associations with it. I think I am an honorary member of their club. I received the honour at the hands of the late Dr. Sir Ross Masood when he was Vice-Chancellor of the University. As for the holy Koran, it was my Muslim clients and friends in South Africa who invited me to read it. They furnished me with Islamic literature. On my return to India, Muslim friends sent me copies of translations of the holy book. Among the senders was Dr. Mahomed Ali, himself a translator, and the late Mr. Pickthall, also a translator of the book. I was presented by the late Hakimsaheb Ajmal Khan with Maulana Shibli's translation. Have I changed or have the times so changed that it has become a crime for a non-Muslim like me to read and even dare to put his own interpretation upon the Koran? Many pious Muslims have remarked that I am a better Muslim than most Muslims in that I act in the spirit of the Koran and know more of the life of the Prophet than most Muslims. Whose testimony am I to accept—these Muslim friends' or the research scholar's and of those who think like him? I wonder.

The research scholar is right in imputing to me the desire to read my meaning into the Koran. Surely there is no harm in it so long as I remain absolutely faithful to the text and approach my task with a prayerful and open mind. My correspondent should know as a scholar that an interpretation of a life or a book is not necessarily correct because it has been handed down for generations. An error does not cease to be one after a given number of repetitions by a given number of men for a given number of years. The Biblical texts are still being corrected. And many good Christians believe that the Christianity of the West is a negation of Christ's central teaching. It is just possible that the research scholar's views about the qualifications required for reading and interpreting the Koran and his own interpretation are wrong, and that my being a non-Muslim is no bar to my reading the Koran or interpreting it. And it is not at all impossible that my interpretation may be found to be right. It will be an evil day if the reading and interpreting of religious books are to be confined only to those who wear particular religious labels. I ask my correspondent and his companions, as their friend, to shed what in my opinion is their gross intolerance and give the same credit to others for seeing truth as they claim for themselves. No one has a monopoly of truth. All truth represented by imperfect humans that we are is relative. We can each act according to our lights. God alone knows the reality. That being so, it behoves research scholars at least to be humble and tolerant. Fanaticism and intolerance can neither conduce to research work nor advance the cause they represent.

*Harijan*, 29-9-'40, p. 297



## A NARROW VIEW OF RELIGION

## I

(From "Shrirampur Diary")

Gandhiji then alluded to two telegrams received from the *Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam* in Madras and Bombay respectively. They said that he, an unbeliever, had no right of interference in the Islamic law. He submitted that the telegrams were based on ignorance of facts. He had not interfered at all in the practice of religion. He had neither the right nor the wish to do so. All he had done was to tender advice and that based on his reading of the Prophet's sayings etc. What was more, he had observed in many cultured Muslim families total disregard of the purdah as it is observed today. But that did not signify less observance of the purdah of the heart, which was the reality, in his opinion, aimed at by Islam. Whatever it was, it was open to the Muslim hearers to reject his advice if they felt that it was in conflict with the tenets of Islam. The critical telegrams received by him betrayed, in his opinion, grave intolerance of other opinion than that of the critics. Let them not forget that the Courts of Law including the Privy Council, which were often composed of non-Muslims, interpreted the Islamic law and imposed interpretation on the Islamic world. He, on the contrary, sought merely to give an opinion. If he could not do so for fear of criticism or even physical punishment, he would be an unworthy representative of non-violence and truth.

*Harijan*, 9-2-'47, p. 14 at p. 20.

## II

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

Yesterday evening a Maulavi wanted to speak for a short time. Gandhiji had sensed what he wanted to speak. He therefore, contrary to wont, allowed him to speak for the five minutes which he wanted by the watch. The Maulavi Saheb took no more than three minutes but said what



he wanted to say. He resented Gandhiji's remark on the purdah system in vogue in Bengal. He had no right to speak on the Islamic law. Gandhiji thought this was a narrow view of religion. He claimed the right to study and interpret the message of Islam. The Maulavi Saheb further resented coupling of the name of Rama, a mere young King with Rahim, name of God, similarly of Krishna with Karim. Gandhiji said this was a narrow view of Islam. Islam was not a creed to be preserved in a box. It was open to mankind to examine it and accept or reject its tenets. He hoped this narrow view was not shared by the Muslims of Bengal or rather India.

*Harijan*, 23-2-'47, p. 37 at p. 39

### THE CRIME OF READING BIBLE !

Several correspondents have written to me taking me to task for reading the New Testament to the students of the Gujarat National College. One of them asks:

“Will you please say why you are reading the Bible to the students of the Gujarat National College? Is there nothing useful in our literature? Is the Gita less to you than the Bible? You are never tired of saying that you are a staunch Sanatani Hindu. Have you not now been found out as a Christian in secret? You may say a man does not become a Christian by reading the Bible. But is not reading the Bible to the boys a way of converting them to Christianity? Can the boys remain uninfluenced by the Bible reading? Are they not likely to become Christians by reading the Bible? What is there specially in the Bible that is not to be found in our sacred books? I do hope you will give an adequate reply and give preference to the Vedas over the Bible.”

I am afraid I cannot comply with the last request of my correspondent. I must give preference to that which the boys lawfully want over what I or others may desire. When they invited me to give them an hour per week, I gave them the choice between reading the Gita, Tulasidas' Ramayana, and answering questions. By a majority of votes, they decided to have the New Testament and

questions and answers. In my opinion, the boys were entitled to make that choice. They have every right to read the Bible or to have it read to them. I offered to read the Gita or the Ramayana as I am reading both at the Ashram to the inmates and as therefore the reading of either at the National College would have involved the least strain, and the least preparation. But the boys of the College probably thought they could read the other books through others but they would have from me my interpretation of the New Testament as they knew that I had made a fair study of it.

I hold that it is the duty of every cultured man or woman to read sympathetically the scriptures of the world. If we are to respect others' religions as we would have them to respect our own, a friendly study of the world's religions is a sacred duty. We need not dread, upon our grown up children, the influence of scriptures other than our own. We liberalize their outlook upon life by encouraging them to study freely all that is clean. Fear there would be when someone reads his own scriptures to young people with intention secretly or openly of converting them. He must then be biassed in favour of his own scriptures. For myself, I regard my study of and reverence for the Bible, the Koran and the other scriptures to be wholly consistent with my claim to be a staunch Sanatani Hindu. He is no Sanatani Hindu who is narrow, bigoted and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found supported in any Sanskrit book. I claim to be a staunch Sanatani Hindu because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures to satisfy the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for or my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have indeed left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.

The charge of being a Christian in secret is not new. It is both a libel and a compliment—a libel because there are men who believe me to be capable of being secretly



anything, i.e. for fear of being that openly. There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgment of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Musalman, with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Koran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Musalman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus nor Christians nor Musalmans. There all are judged not according to their labels or professions but according to their actions irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence there will always be these labels. I therefore prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.

The hyper-sensitiveness that my correspondents have betrayed is but an indication of the intensity of the wave of intoleration that is sweeping through this unhappy land. Let those who can, remain unmoved by it.

*Young India*, 2-9-'26, p. 308

### 36

## INTRODUCING RELIGION BY COMPULSION OR FORCE

(Originally appeared in columns of "Notes" under the title "Low Moral Tone?")

A correspondent writes:

"I am myself a Hindu and belong to the highest Brahmana class. But I belong to the advanced *So-ham* party. I believe in reason, for reason is God and God is reason. The philosophy of the Hindus which emphasizes the *So-ham*—I am He—doctrine has today built up a barrier which is more impenetrable than the Mt. Everest. The religion that built up its shrine on mind-purity is so obscured by the weed growths of ritualism that the real light is hidden from



view. The culture that emphasized universal brotherhood under the fatherhood of God stands today for the treading of the millions by Brahmana's offsprings who have nothing in common but the archaic mythological derivation from the common stock. The Ahimsa doctrine has made us sneaking, snivelling cowards. A Hindu never plays fair with a Hindu; a Mohammedan plays fair with a Mohammedan and so does a Christian with a Christian. A Hindu is more tolerant of other customs outside the Hindu fold—another instance of downright cowardice—a Mohammedan is never tolerant and a Christian seldom. Shall educated Hindus continue this game of humbuggism or by taking up arms end it?"

I can throw little light on what the correspondent says, but I can advise. Reform must begin with ourselves. 'Physician, heal thyself' is a sound doctrine. Those who realize the lowness of the moral tone and the presence of cowardice among Hindus may at least begin with themselves. The truth of the charge may be generally admitted though not without reservations. But will resort to arms end the evil? How is the low moral tone to be remedied by the brandishing of the sword? Can the innumerable sub-castes or untouchability or the often meaningless ritual be removed by force? Will it not be introducing religion by compulsion? If God is reason, then the appeal must be not to the sword but to reason.

Or does the writer refer to the Hindu-Muslim tension and want the Hindus to resort to force of arms? On a close examination it will be discovered that in a vast majority of cases resort to arms is not only not necessary but harmful. What is wanted is the art of suffering. I hold that it is not Ahimsa that has made of us cowards but the loss of it. Surely it is not Ahimsa that makes us wish ill to people that oppose us but our utter ignorance of it. Those who do not take up arms refrain not because they are deterred by any notion of Ahimsa but because they are afraid to die. I have often wished that those who have no scruples about arms will dare to take them up. Then shall we be free of the burden of so-called Ahimsaists who, being afraid of injury, seek to cover their cowardice under the name of Ahimsa and corrupt the greatest truth of life. The same may be said of *So-ham*. It is a scientific truth which we

belie in our treatment of the untouchables. The charges recited in the last paragraph cannot be sustained. What is true of Hindus is also largely true of the other sects. Human nature works in the same manner in the same circumstances. Is a Musalman never tolerant? I see hundreds in my peregrinations who are as tolerant as Hindus. I have seen Christians too not seldom but frequently tolerant. The writer will also find upon observation that those who are intolerant towards sects are no less intolerant among themselves.

*Young India*, 19-11-'25, p. 403

### 37

#### ADVICE TO INDIAN CHRISTIANS

(The following extract is taken from an article by Shri Pyarelal which originally appeared under the title "The Almoda Tour—II".)

An important function that Gandhiji had at Almoda was with the members of the Christian community of Almoda who presented their address to Gandhiji on the grounds of their Church. Gandhiji's reply which opened with a reference to his numerous Christian contacts in India as well as abroad and particularly his close friendly relations with the late Principal Rudra of St. Stephen's College, Delhi, was a feeling appeal to the Indian Christians completely to identify themselves with Indian ideals and Indian nationalist aspirations and not to regard India's ancient culture and civilization as a relic of barbarism to be looked down upon and despised but to treasure it as a precious heritage that had to be enriched and enlarged. Surely a civilization that had produced such a galaxy of saints and prophets as India had, that boasted of sons like Chaitanya and Tagore and which was built on penance of so many pure souls could not be a thing wholly evil. He held all religions to be true, though at the same time no man-expounded religion could claim perfection which was the attribute of God alone. Similarly it was their duty not to dissociate themselves from their fellow countrymen who professed a different faith from



theirs but to cultivate an attitude of sympathy and broad tolerance towards them, to understand and appreciate their view-point and to help them not by proselytizing them but by making Hindus better Hindus, Musalmans better Musalmans and all of them better Indians.

*Young India*, 27-6-'29, p. 213 at p. 214

## 38

## PERSECUTION OF ROMAN CATHOLICS

At the risk of being longer than usual, Gandhiji felt bound finally to refer to a case of persecution of the Roman Catholics near Gurgaon, which was brought to his notice. The village in question where it took place was known as Kanhai—about 25 miles from Delhi. One of his visitors was an Indian Roman Catholic Chaplain and the other was a catechist belonging to a village. They had produced to Gandhiji a letter from the Roman Catholics in the village relating the story of persecution at the hands of the Hindus. This was curiously enough in Urdu. He understood that the inhabitants of that part of the country, whether they were Hindus or others, could only speak Hindustani and write in the Urdu script. The informants told him that the Roman Catholics there had been threatened if they did not remove themselves from their village. He hoped that it was an idle threat and that these Christian brothers and sisters would be left to follow their own faith and avocation without let or hindrance. Surely, they were not less entitled to their freedom than they were under the British regime, now that there was freedom from political bondage. That freedom could never be confined to the Hindus only in the Union and the Muslims only in Pakistan. He had in one of his speeches already told the audience that when the mad fury against the Muslims had abated, it was likely to be vented on others; but when he made the remark he was not prepared for such an early verification of his forebodings. The fury against the Muslims had not yet completely abated. So far as he knew, these Christians were utterly inoffensive. It was suggested that



their offence consisted in being Christians, more so because they ate beef and pork. As a matter of curiosity Gandhiji had asked the Chaplain whether there was any truth in the remark and he was told that these Roman Catholics, of their own accord, had abjured beef and pork not only now but long ago. If this kind of unreasoning prejudice persisted, the future for Independent India was dismal. The Chaplain himself had recently had his bicycle taken away from him when he was at Rewari and he narrowly escaped death. Was this agony to end only with the extinction of all the non-Hindus and the non-Sikhs?

Gandhiji said that he had no desire to live to witness such a dissolution of India and he would ask the audience to join him in the wish and prayer that good sense would return to the Hindus and the Sikhs of the Union.

*Harijan*, 30-11-'47, p. 442 at p. 446

### 39

#### OUTRAGEOUS ANALOGY

A correspondent, who from his name appears to have Hindi as his mother tongue, writes thus in English:

“This is with reference to your many and continued appeals to treat Muslims as brothers and guarantee their safety so that they do not migrate from here to Pakistan.—‘A man was walking along one cold day, when he came across a snake lying frozen with the cold. Taking pity on the reptile, he picked it up and thinking to give it warmth, put it in his pocket. The warmth soon revived the snake and the first thing it did was to dig its poisonous fangs into his saviour and kill him.’”

Anger has betrayed this correspondent into an outrageous analogy. To liken a human being, however degraded he may be, to a snake to justify inhuman treatment is surely a degrading performance. To damn crores of human beings for the faults of a few or many belonging to a particular faith seems to me to be the height of madness. The correspondent should also remember that I have known rabidly fanatical Muslims to use the very analogy in respect of Hindus. No Hindu would like to be regarded as a snake.

To treat a man as a brother is not to say that he should be trusted even when he is proved untrustworthy. And is it not a sign of cowardice to kill a man and his family for fear that he may prove untrustworthy? Picture a society in which every man is permitted to judge his fellow. Yet, that is the state to which we are being reduced in some parts of India.

Lastly, let me, for the sake of the snake kind, correct the common error that eighty snakes out of every hundred are perfectly harmless and they render useful service in nature.

*Harijan*, 12-10-'47, p. 368

## SECTION THREE : RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

40

### DESECRATION OF HOLY PLACE

(The following extract is taken from a speech of Gandhiji in Gulbarga, report of which appeared along with the report of another speech of his in an article, "Two Speeches" by M. D.)

When I went into the temple\* I was shown the spot where the idol was removed and the Nandi was desecrated. I tell you the sight pained me. You may call me an idolater if you will. I see God everywhere and in everything. I tell you God would never approve of those acts of desecration. Whilst in Yeravda Jail, I read Maulana Shibli's life of the Prophet, I also read *Usva-e-Sahaba* and can say that those who did the acts were wrong, that Islam never sanctions such things and they were guilty before God and man.

*Young India*, 10-3-'27, p. 79 at p. 80

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### RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

#### I

(An extract from a paragraph entitled "Shraddhanand Memorial" which originally appeared in the "Notes" is reproduced below.)

*Shuddhi* is conversion properly so-called. And I question its use in this age of growing toleration and enlightenment. I am against conversion, whether it is known as *shuddhi* by Hindus, *tabligh* by Musalmans or proselytizing by Christians. Conversion is a heart process known only to and by God. It must be left to itself. . . . Those who believe in it have a perfect right to follow their own course without let or hindrance, so long as it is kept within proper

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\*Sharana Basappa Temple.

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limits, i.e. so long as there is no force nor fraud nor material inducement and so long as the parties are free agents and of mature age and understanding.

*Young India*, 6-1-'27, p. 2

## II

(The following extract is reproduced from Gandhiji's speech at Solapur, report of which appeared along with report of another speech of his in an article "Two Speeches" by M. D.)

I fail to understand the *shuddhi*, *tabligh* and proselytization as they are carried on today. I cannot understand a man changing the religion of his forefathers at the instance of another. But that is my personal conviction. No one need stop *shuddhi*, *tabligh* or proselytization at my instance. My own duty is clear. I must go on purifying myself and hoping that only thereby I would react on my surroundings. It is my unshakable conviction that penance and self-purification are the only means for the protection of Hinduism.

*Young India*, 10-3-'27, p. 79

## III

(From "The Week" by M. D.)

I would not only not try to convert but would not even secretly pray that any one should embrace my faith. . . . Cases of real honest conversion are quite possible. If some people for their inward satisfaction and growth change their religion let them do so.

*Young India*, 19-1-'28, p. 21

## MASS CONVERSION

(Originally appeared under the title "About Conversion")

Mr. A. A. Paul of the Federation of International Fellowships asked me the other day to define in these columns my position on 'conversion'. I told him to frame definite questions on which he would like my answers. The result was the following letter with a list of propositions attached:

"You remember that a little over a month ago, I wrote to you asking you whether you would publish a statement giving your views on 'conversion'. You wrote back to say that it would be easier for you if we could put them in the form of questions or assertions. At the request of the Executive Committee of the Madras International Fellowship, one of our Christian members has prepared the enclosed statement and the Committee has asked me to pass it on to you with the request that you will kindly find it possible to answer these statements in the *Harijan*. Of course you will notice that the questions are framed from the Christian point of view; but the Committee feels that the questions will apply equally well to other missionary religions which are engaged in conversion programme. May I hope that you will find it possible to explain your attitude to these questions?"

**Propositions**

1. Conversion is a change of heart from sin to God. It is the work of God. Sin is separation from God.

2. The Christian believes that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's revelation to mankind, that He is our saviour from sin, that He alone can bring the sinner to God and thus enable him to live.

3. The Christian to whom God has become a living reality and power through Christ, regards it as his privilege and duty to speak about Jesus and to proclaim the free offer which He came on earth to make.

4. If any man's heart is so moved by the hearing of this message as to repent and wish to live a new life as a disciple of Jesus, the Christian regards it as right to admit him to the company of His professed believers which is called the Christian Church.

5. The Christian shall do all in his power to sound the sincerity of conviction in all such cases and shall point out, as he can, the consequences of such a step, stressing the duty a man owes to his family.

6. The Christian shall do everything in his power to prevent any motives of self-seeking on his part and of material considerations on the part of the convert.

7. Inasmuch as Jesus came to give full life and that as a matter of history conversion has often meant an enhancing of personality, the Christian shall not be accused of using material inducements if conversion result in the social uplift of the convert—it always being understood that such shall never be used as a means to an end.

8. The Christian is right in accepting as his duty the care of the sincere convert, body, soul and mind.

9. It shall not be brought against the Christian that he is using material inducements, when certain facts in Hindu social theory, out of his control, are in themselves an inducement to the Harijan. (But see points 5 and 6).

In order to understand the background of these propositions, the reader should know that the origin of the main question was a discussion I was carrying on with Mr. A. A. Paul on the so-called mass conversion of a village predominantly or wholly composed of Harijans. The reader may later on read more of this 'conversion'. For the present purpose it is enough that he understands that it is the method of mass conversion that has to be tested in the light of these propositions. Indeed the ninth proposition almost says as much.

I have read the propositions several times, and the more I read them the more I feel that they can be applied only to individual contacts, never to the mass of mankind. Take the very first proposition. Sin is defined to be 'separation from God'. 'Conversion is a change of heart from sin to God. It is the work of God.' So says the author of the propositions. If conversion is the work of God, why should that work be taken away from Him? And who is man to take away anything from God? He may become a humble instrument in the hands of God. Even so he cannot be judge of men's hearts. I often wonder whether we



are always true judges of our own hearts. 'Man, know thyself' must have been wrung out of a desperate heart. And if we know so little of ourselves, how much less must we know of our neighbours and remote strangers who may differ from us in a multitude of things, some of which are of the highest moment? The second proposition deals with the Christian belief handed to the believer from generation to generation, the truth of which thousands of Christians born are never called upon to test for themselves, and rightly not. Surely it is a dangerous thing to present it to those who have been brought up to a different belief. And it would appear to me to be impertinent on my part to present my untested belief to the professor of another which for aught I know may be as true as mine. It is highly likely that mine may be good enough for me and his for him. A thick woollen coat would be the thing for one living in the cold regions of the earth, as a piece of loin-cloth for another living near the equatorial regions.

The third proposition too, like the first, relates to the mysteries of religion which are not understood by the common people who take them in faith. They work well enough among people living in the traditional faith. They will repel those who have been brought up to believe something else.

The other five propositions deal with the conduct of the missionary among those whom he is seeking to convert. They seem to me to be almost impossible of application in practice. The start being wrong, all that follows must be necessarily so. Thus how is the Christian to sound the sincerity of the conviction of his hearers? By a show of hands? By personal conversation? By a temporary trial? Any test that can be conceived will fail even to be reasonably conclusive. No one but God knows a man's heart. Is the Christian so sure of his being so right in body, mind and soul as to feel comfortably "right in accepting as his duty the care of the sincere convert, body, soul and mind"?

The last proposition — the crown of all the preceding ones — takes one's breath away. For it makes it clear that

the other eight are to be applied in all their fullness to the poor Harijans. And yet the very first proposition has not ceased to puzzle the brains of some of the most intellectual and philosophical persons even in the present generation. Who knows the nature of original sin? What is the meaning of separation from God? What is that of the union with God? What are the signs of him who is united to God? Are all who dare to preach the message of Jesus the Christ sure of their union with God? If they are not, who will test the Harijans' knowledge of these deep things?

This is my reaction to the foregoing propositions. I hope no Christian who reads it will be offended by it. I would have been false to my numerous Christian friends, if I had hidden from them my true position on the nine propositions.

My own detached view may now be stated in a few words. I believe that there is no such thing as conversion from one faith to another in the accepted sense of the term. It is a highly personal matter for the individual and his God. I may not have any design upon my neighbour as to his faith which I must honour even as I honour my own. For I regard all the great religions of the world as true at any rate for the people professing them as mine is true for me. Having reverently studied the scriptures of the world, I have no difficulty in perceiving the beauties in all of them. I could no more think of asking a Christian or a Musalman or a Parsi or a Jew to change his faith than I would think of changing my own. This makes me no more oblivious of the limitations of the professors of those faiths, than it makes me of the grave limitations of the professors of mine. And seeing that it takes all my resources in trying to bring my practice to the level of my faith and in preaching the same to my co-religionists, I do not dream of preaching to the followers of other faiths. 'Judge not lest ye be judged' is a sound maxim for one's conduct. It is a conviction daily growing upon me that the great and rich Christian missions will render true service to India, if they can persuade themselves to confine their activities to humanitarian service without the ulterior motive of converting India or at least her unsophisticated villagers to



Christianity, and destroying their social superstructure, which notwithstanding its many defects has stood now from time immemorial the onslaughts upon it from within and from without. Whether they — the missionaries — and we wish it or not, what is true in the Hindu faith will abide, what is untrue will fall to pieces. Every living faith must have within itself the power of rejuvenation if it is to live.

*Harijan*, 28-9-'35, p. 260

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## CONVERSION THROUGH QUESTIONABLE MEANS

## I

(Originally appeared under the title "Foreign Missionaries")

Correspondents angry or curious have sent me clippings from the press or their comments on what has been ascribed to me by interviewers on the subject of foreign missionaries. Only one correspondent has been curious enough to ask me whether I am correctly reported. Even George Joseph, my erstwhile co-worker and gracious host in Madura has gone into hysterics without condescending to verify the report. That is the unkindest cut of all.

This is what a reporter has put into my mouth:

'If instead of confining themselves to humanitarian work and material service to the poor, they do proselytization by means of medical aid, education, etc. then I would certainly ask them to withdraw. Every nation's religion is as good as any other. Certainly India's religions are adequate for her people. We need no converting spiritually.'

I have given so many interviews that I cannot recall the time or the occasion or the context for the statement. All I can say is that it is a travesty of what I have always said and held. My views on foreign missions are no secret. I have more than once expounded them before missionary audiences. I am therefore unable to understand the fury over the distorted version of my views.



Let me re-touch the statement as I should make it:

‘If instead of confining themselves purely to humanitarian work such as education, medical services to the poor and the like, they would use these activities of theirs for the purpose of proselytizing, I would certainly like them to withdraw. Every nation considers its own faith to be as good as that of any other. Certainly the great faiths held by the people of India are adequate for her people. India stands in no need of conversion from one faith to another.’

Let me amplify the bald statement. I hold that proselytizing under the cloak of humanitarian work is, to say the least, unhealthy. It is most certainly resented by the people here. Religion after all is a deeply personal matter, it touches the heart. Why should I change my religion because a doctor who professes Christianity as his religion has cured me of some disease or why should the doctor expect or suggest such a change whilst I am under his influence? Is not medical relief its own reward and satisfaction? Or why should I, whilst I am in a missionary educational institution, have Christian teaching thrust upon me? In my opinion these practices are not uplifting and give rise to suspicion if not even secret hostility. The methods of conversion must be like Caesar’s wife above suspicion. Faith is not imparted like secular subjects. It is given through the language of the heart. If a man has a living faith in him, it spreads its aroma like the rose its scent. Because of its invisibility, the extent of its influence is far wider than that of the visible beauty of the colour of the petals.

I am, then, not against conversion. But I am against the modern methods of it. Conversion nowadays has become a matter of business, like any other. I remember having read a missionary report saying how much it cost per head to convert and then presenting a budget for the next harvest.

Yes, I do maintain that India’s great faiths are all-sufficing for her. Apart from Christianity and Judaism, Hinduism and its off-shoots, Islam and Zoroastrianism are living faiths. No one faith is perfect. All faiths are equally

dear to their respective votaries. What is wanted therefore is living friendly contact among the followers of the great religions of the world and not a clash among them in the fruitless attempt on the part of each community to show the superiority of its faith over the rest. Through such friendly contact it will be possible for us all to rid our respective faiths of shortcomings and excrescences.

It follows from what I have said above that India is in no need of conversion of the kind I have in mind. Conversion in the sense of self-purification, self-realization is the crying need of the times. That however is not what is ever meant by proselytizing. To those who would convert India, might it not be said, 'Physician heal thyself'?

*Young India*, 23-4-'31, p. 83

## II

(Originally published under the title "Foreign Missionaries Again")

Dear Mahatma,

Forgive me for intruding at this critical moment when you are occupied with the supreme task of working out India's destiny. But circumstances force me to enquire from you whether you uttered the following words to a press representative in an interview at New Delhi on March 21st, when you were asked whether you would favour the retention of American and other foreign missionaries when India secured self-government.

"If instead of confining themselves to purely humanitarian work and material service, they do proselytizing by means of medical aid, education etc., then I would certainly ask them to withdraw. Every nation's religion is as good as any other. Certainly India's religions are adequate for her people. We need no converting spiritually."

A friend of mine gave me a copy of the *Madras Catholic Leader* of the 26th March, and it is there that you are reported to have given expression to the above remarks. But I doubt if you ever said those words. Hence, my writing this to you for confirmation.

If it is true that you made those remarks, I am sure you had good reasons for doing so, though they are not apparent to me. At the moment I cannot believe you said, "Every nation's religion is as good as any other. Certainly India's religions are quite adequate for her people. We need no converting spiritually."



I am a Christian, but I certainly am against Christianity being brought as an instrument of imperialism. But as a message of love and fellowship, who will deny it a place in Indian life? In this great struggle for Swaraj, are we not fighting for liberty, liberty to worship our God as we please, liberty to convince our fellows who are willing to be convinced by us, liberty to be convinced by our fellows who can convince us? I have the greatest respect for the great religions of India and pity for those missionaries who come to India with the misguided zeal to 'collect souls' for Christ. Enough of such missionaries who depend on political, economic and sometimes physical influence to bring religious conviction to the people. Enough of them, I say. But will you deny him a home who comes to add to India's great spiritual heritage the treasures of his own spiritual experience? Are you against him who comes to teach by example and precept and not by compulsion or unfair means, those of you who will care to listen to him, the great truths that he had learnt? Is India so bigoted as to think that within her are confined all the riches of the world, all the treasures of knowledge and human experience?

I cannot believe that you said, "Certainly India's religions are adequate for her people." What are "India's religions"? Do not Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism belong to the world as Christianity is? Why did Swami Vivekanand go to America with his inspiring message of Hinduism? How could anyone call Islam an "India's religion" and with the same breath say that Christianity is not a religion of India? Religion, I deem, is a matter between an individual and his own conception of Right Conduct. Religion belongs to the great realm of thought and personal experience which knows neither boundaries nor nations.

As one of the multitude of your unknown admirers throughout the world, I salute you and claim you as belonging not to India alone but to the world, as the noblest and greatest achievement of our age. You have numerous Christians within and without India, who are your devoted followers and admirers. I am sure many of them will be interested in your reply to this letter. As for me I shall not be disappointed even if I am told that you made those remarks quoted above. For my belief in your sincerity and good faith is unshaken. But I would like to know, if you made those remarks, what you meant by them, for I confess they are a mystery to me.



May God help you in your great struggle for Purna Swaraj and may there be soon peace in India and the world outside.

I remain,  
Yours respectfully,  
JAMES P. RUTNAM

St. Xavier's  
Nuwara Eliya, Ceylon,  
11th April, 1931

I do not know that in reply to this letter I need do more than refer the writer to my article in *Young India*. It might be as well to add that in mentioning Hinduisim, Islam, Zoroastrianism etc. as India's religions, I had no desire to claim them as India's exclusively or to exclude Christianity. The issue was Christianity on the one hand claimed as the one true religion, and other religions on the other being regarded as false. In joining issue I contended that the great world religions other than Christianity professed in India were no less true than Christianity. It was thus neither relevant nor necessary for me to assert before Christian missionaries and their protagonists that Christianity was true. Moreover, with my known partiality for the Sermon on the Mount and my repeated declarations that its author was one of the greatest among the teachers of mankind, I could not suspect that there would be any charge against me of underrating Christianity. As for Christian Indians, I count among them many warm friends and I have had no difficulty whatsoever in establishing friendly touch with the Christian masses wherever I have gone. Nor is there any fear of my estranging even the foreign missionaries among whom I claim many personal friends. The attack against me has therefore surprised me not a little especially because the views I have now enunciated have been held by me since 1916, and were deliberately expressed in a carefully written address before a purely missionary audience in Madras and since repeated on many a Christian platform. The recent criticism has but confirmed the view, for the criticism has betrayed intolerance even of friendly criticism. The missionaries know that in spite of my outspoken criticism of their methods,

they have in India and among non-Christians no warmer friend than I. And I suggest to my critics that there must be something wrong about their method or, if they prefer, themselves when they will not brook sincere expression of an opinion different from theirs. In India under Swaraj I have no doubt that foreign missionaries will be at liberty to do their proselytizing as I would say, in the wrong way; but they would be expected to bear with those who, like me, may point out that in their opinion the way is wrong.

*Young India*, 7-5-'31, p. 102

#### 44

### CONVERSION WITHOUT A CLEAN HEART

(Originally appeared under the title "To My Numerous Muslim Friends")

The newspapers report that about a fortnight ago my eldest son Harilal, now nearing fifty years, accepted Islam and that on Friday last 29th May, in the midst of a large congregation in the Juma Musjid at Bombay he was permitted to announce his acceptance amid great acclamation and that after his speech was finished, he was besieged by his admirers who vied with one another to shake hands with him. If his acceptance was from the heart and free from any wordly considerations, I should have no quarrel. For I believe Islam to be as true a religion as my own.

But I have gravest doubt about this acceptance being from the heart or free from selfish considerations. Every one who knows my son Harilal, knows that he has been for years addicted to the drink evil and has been in the habit of visiting houses of ill-fame. For some years he has been living on the charity of friends who have helped him unstintingly. He is indebted to some Pathans from whom he had borrowed on heavy interest. Up to only recently he was in dread of his life from his Pathan creditors in Bombay. Now he is the hero of the hour in that city. He had a most devoted wife who always forgave his many sins including his unfaithfulness. He has three grown-up



children, two daughters and one son, whom he ceased to support long ago.

Not many weeks ago he wrote to the Press complaining against Hindus — not Hinduism — and threatening to go over to Christianity or Islam. The language of the letter showed quite clearly that he would go over to the highest bidder. The letter had the desired effect. Through the good offices of a Hindu councillor he got a job in Nagpur Municipality. And he came out with another letter to the Press about recalling the first and declaring emphatic adherence to his ancestral faith.

But, as events have proved, his pecuniary ambition was not satisfied and in order to satisfy that ambition, he has embraced Islam. There are other facts which are known to me and which strengthen my inference.

When I was in Nagpur in April last, he had come to see me and his mother and he told me how he was amused by the attentions that were being paid to him by the missionaries of rival faiths. God can work wonders. He has been known to have changed the stoniest hearts and turned sinners into saints, as it were, in a moment. Nothing will please me better than to find that during the Nagpur meeting and the Friday announcement he had repented of the past and had suddenly become a changed man having shed the drink habit and sexual lust.

But the Press reports give no such evidence. He still delights in sensation and in good living. If he had changed, he would have written to me to gladden my heart. All my children have had the greatest freedom of thought and action. They have been taught to regard all religions with the same respect that they paid to their own. Harilal knew that if he had told me that he had found the key to a right life and peace in Islam, I would have put no obstacle in his path. But no one of us, including his son, now twenty-four years old and who is with me, knew anything about the event till we saw the announcement in the Press.

My views on Islam are well known to the Musalmans who are reported to have enthused over my son's profession. A brotherhood of Islam has telegraphed to me thus:



“Expect like your son you truth-seeker to embrace Islam truest religion of the world.”

I must confess that all this has hurt me. I sense no religious spirit behind this demonstration. I feel that those who are responsible for Harilal's acceptance of Islam did not take the most ordinary precautions they ought to have in a case of this kind.

Harilal's apostasy is no loss to Hinduism and his admission to Islam a source of weakness to it if, as I apprehend, he remains the same wreck that he was before.

Surely conversion is a matter between man and his Maker who alone knows His creatures' hearts. And conversion without a clean heart is, in my opinion, a denial of God and religion. Conversion without cleanness of heart can only be a matter of sorrow, not joy, to a godly person.

My object in addressing these lines to my numerous Muslim friends is to ask them to examine Harilal in the light of his immediate past and if they find that his conversion is a soulless matter, to tell him so plainly and disown him, and if they discover sincerity in him, to see that he is protected against temptations so that his sincerity results in his becoming a God-fearing member of society. Let them know that excessive indulgence has softened his brain and undermined the sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. I do not mind whether he is known as Abdulla or Harilal if by adopting one name for the other, he becomes a true devotee of God which both the names mean.

*Harijan*, 6-6-'36, p. 129

## CONVERSION — TRUE AND FALSE

(Originally appeared under the title "Four Questions")

A correspondent asks the following four questions:

"1. Hindus who once renounced their faith for some reason or other and joined Islam or Christianity, sincerely repent and want to come back. Should we re-convert them or not? You may take the instance of your own son Harilal.

"2. Lakhs of the depressed class people in South India, as you know, have joined Christianity wholesale. Some of them, since the Travancore Durbar Declaration and the popularity of the Harijan movement, feel it worth while to readopt their ancestral faith. What would you advise about them?

"3. A Hindu was made to join another faith for certain material considerations. After some time he feels disillusioned and comes and knocks at our door. Shall we welcome him or not?

"4. Young Hindu boys and girls are often taken hold of by Christian missionaries and converted. At some places Muslims are also making use of their orphanages for this purpose. What should we do, when these boys and girls, either alone or with their guardians, approach us for *shuddhi*?"

These or such questions have been asked and answered before now in these columns in some shape or other. I do not need to answer each separately. In my opinion they are not examples of real heart conversions. If a person through fear, compulsion, starvation or for material gain or consideration, goes over to another faith, it is a misnomer to call it conversion. Most cases of mass conversions, of which we have heard so much during the past two years, have been to my mind false coin. Real conversion springs from the heart and at the prompting of God, not of a stranger. The voice of God can always be distinguished from the voice of man. The hypothetical cases coined by my correspondent are, so far as I can see, not cases of conversion. I would, therefore, unhesitatingly readmit to the Hindu fold all such repentants without ado, certainly without any *shuddhi*. *Shuddhi* is not applicable to such cases. And, as



I believe in the equality of all the great religions of the earth, I regard no man as polluted because he has forsaken the branch on which he was sitting and gone over to another of the same tree. If he comes back to the original branch, he deserves to be welcomed and not told that he had committed a sin by reason of his having forsaken the family to which he belonged. In so far as he may be deemed to have erred, he has sufficiently purged himself of it when he repents of the error and retraces his step.

*Harijan*, 25-9-'37, p. 272

## 46

### FUTILITY OF CONVERSION

(From 'Weekly Letter No. 22' by V. G. D.)

Gandhiji had an interesting talk with an American missionary, who asked for his views about conversion. He repeated the opinion he has often given that he did not believe in conversion by human agency. Seekers after Truth were in the same position as the blind men in the Indian parable who went to see an elephant, or rather in a worse position. For, if the physically blind lacked in sight, they were compensated for it to some extent by the enhanced power of other organs of sense. But seekers after Truth could only see as through a glass, darkly, so far as inward sight was concerned. It would, therefore, be sheer presumption on their part to seek to 'convert' others to their own faith. God had as many ways of approaching Him as there were human beings.

Upon the missionary friend attempting a comparison between Jesus and other men revered by humanity, Gandhiji said that such comparison was fruitless. Jesus of history was not the same as the Jesus whom Christians adored. For them He was the living God of their conception. Similarly he himself believed in the Krishna of his own imagination, who was identical with God and had not much to do with the historic Krishna about whom there was a mass of conflicting evidence. Historical persons were dead. The mystical incarnations were living ideas — more real than



earthly existences. Religion could never be based on history, for, if it was so based, faith would be undermined. Tulasidas, therefore, climbed the point by saying that *Nama* (the name) was greater than Rama.

*Harijan*, 4-5-'34, p. 89 at p. 90

## 47

## RELIGION, NOT A MATTER OF BARTER

(Originally appeared under the title "Limitation of Reformers")

Ever since Dr. Ambedkar has thrown his bombshell in the midst of Hindu society in the shape of threatened conversion, frantic efforts have been made to wean him from the proposed step. Dr. Ambedkar's threat has had its repercussions on Harijans too, who are at all literate and are able to read newspapers. They have begun to approach Hindu institutions or reformers with a demand for posts, scholarships, or the like, accompanying it with the statement that the writer might, in the event of refusal, be obliged to change to another faith, aid having been offered on behalf of the representatives of that faith.

Without a doubt these threats are a portent and a matter of grave concern to those who care at all for the religion of their forefathers. But it will not be served by coming to terms with those who have lost faith in Hinduism or for that matter in any religion. Religion is not a matter of barter. It is a matter for every individual to decide for himself to which faith he will belong. It does not lend itself to purchase in any shape or form. Or if such an expression can be used in connection with things of the spirit, religion can only be purchased with one's own blood. If, therefore, any Harijan wants to give up Hinduism, he should be entirely free to do so.

There must be a searching of heart for the reformer. Has his practice or that of his neighbour's caused the defection? If it has and if it is found to be improper, it must be changed.

It is an admitted fact that the conduct of a vast number of Hindus who call themselves Sanatanists is such as to

cause the greatest inconvenience and irritation to the Harijans all over India. The wonder is that many more Harijans than already have, have not left Hinduism. It speaks volumes for their loyalty or for the innate virtue of Hinduism that millions of Harijans have clung to it in spite of the inhumanities to which in the name of that very faith they have been subjected.

This wonderful loyalty of Harijans and their unexampled patience render it imperative for every Savarna Hindu to see that Harijans receive the same treatment that every other Hindu does. The course before Savarnas is, therefore, on the one hand not to interfere with Harijans wishing to leave the Hindu fold by trying to keep them within it by the offer of bribes in the shape of finding employment or scholarships; and on the other hand to insist on full justice being done to Harijans in every walk of life. Indeed reformers should anticipate Harijans' requirements and not wait till they begin to complain. The Harijan Sevak Sangh is the biggest institution for the removal of untouchability. It has wisely adopted a most liberal policy of giving scholarships to deserving students. It employs as many Harijans as possible. But it is in no sense a bureau for finding jobs for unemployed Harijans. Generally speaking, there is no dearth of jobs for Harijans who are fit for the jobs for which they offer themselves. The greatest hardship felt by thousands of Harijans is want of pure water for drinking and domestic use, denial of access to public schools and other institutions, constant pin-pricks in villages, and last but not least, denial of access to temples of worship. These disabilities are stern realities in the lives of the vast mass of Harijans. If they as a mass give up Hinduism, they will do so because of these common disabilities which brand them as lepers of Hindu society. Hinduism is passing through a fiery ordeal. It will perish not through individual conversions, not even through mass conversions, but it will perish because of the sinful denial by the so-called Savarna Hindus of elementary justice to Harijans. Every threat of conversion is, therefore, a warning to the Savarnas that if they do not wake up in time, it may be too late!



One word to the impatient and needy Harijans. They must not use threats when they approach Hindu institutions or individuals for help. They should rely upon the strength of their case commanding a hearing. The majority of Harijans do not know what change of religion can mean. They mutely suffer the continuing degradation to which Savarnas in their selfishness have consigned them. They must be the primary care of Hindu reformers whether they complain or do not. Those who are enlightened enough to know and feel the degradation and know also what change of religion means are either too good Hindus to desert their ancestral faith and deserve every help they need, or being indifferent as to religion, may not claim help from Savarna Hindus in exchange for their condescending to remain in the Hindu fold. I would, therefore, plead with enlightened Harijans for their own sakes not to seek material betterment under threat of conversion. And whilst reformers must on no account yield to threats, they must ceaselessly strive to secure justice for Harijans at the hands of Savarna Hindus.

*Harijan*, 21-3-'36, p. 44

#### 48

### NO CONVERSION PERMISSIBLE IN MY ASHRAM.

(The following paragraph originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "No Conversion Permissible".)

The English press cuttings contain among many delightful items the news that Miss Slade known in the Ashram as Mirabai has embraced Hinduism. I may say that she has not. I hope that she is a better Christian than when four years ago she came to the Ashram. She is not a girl of tender age. She is past thirty and has travelled all alone in Egypt, Persia and Europe befriending trees and animals. I have had the privilege of having under me Musālmān, Parsi and Christian minors. Never was Hindūsim put before them for their acceptance. They were encouraged and induced to respect and read their own scriptures. It is with pleasure that I can recall instances of men and



women, boys and girls having been induced to know and love their faiths better than they did before if they were also encouraged to study the other faiths with sympathy and respect. We have in the Ashram today several faiths represented. No proselytizing is practised or permitted. We recognize that all these faiths are true and divinely inspired, and all have suffered through the necessarily imperfect handling of imperfect men. Miss Slade bears not a Hindu name but an Indian name. And this was done at her instance and for convenience. We have more such instances. Richard Gregg who is not suspected of having given up Christianity is to us Govindji. An old Christian sister, Miss Ada West, now in Louth, became Devibehn to us in Phoenix.

*Young India*, 20-2-'30, p. 64

#### 49

### FEAR OF COMPULSORY CONVERSION

(Originally appeared under the title "Scheduled Castes")

A correspondent writes:

"If the Scheduled Castes of X area are included in Pakistan, they would probably have no alternative other than embracing Islam."

The correspondent is well-educated and is an M.L.A. The question immediately arises as to what will happen to the Scheduled Caste members in the Pakistan areas where they are not living in contiguous areas. Will they all have to embrace Islam? I can only say that their religion must be very poor stuff, if it admits of change like one's clothes. Religion (binding faith) is made of sterner stuff; it is a deep personal matter, more personal than honour. To be true, it must be able to defy coercion of the extremest type.

So much for those who are in fear of compulsory conversion. But what about those who inspire men and women with such fear? I have heard it seriously argued that people have often mistaken voluntary for compulsory conversion. I think the argument does not carry any conviction.

People have been known in all ages to resort to conversion when they have known their friends, relations or neighbours to profess conversion under duress. When, therefore, there is suspicion all round, conversion should be stopped altogether. Here I remind myself of the argument of the correspondent used only the other day that my "brave" words about personal religion would be all right if they were confined to Sannyasis but not to householders who were exposed to a variety of temptations from life. Though I do not endorse this argument, for it weakens those on whose behalf it is led, I cannot help feeling that there is considerable force in it, especially when it is made applicable to members of the Scheduled Castes who have been ill-treated by their fellow Hindus and would, therefore, yield to compulsion in the hope of avoiding ill-treatment from their fellows who arrogate to themselves superiority, falsely so-called. Frequently this compulsion assumes subtle forms, as for instance, free grants of land or offer of service even beyond merit.

*Harijan*, 3-8-'47, p. 261

## 50

### SERVICE WITH ULTERIOR AIM OF CONVERSION

(From "Bihar Notes" by M. K. G.)

From Chakradharpur to Chaibasa is a pleasant motor ride over a very good road. It was at Chaibasa that I made the acquaintance of the Ho tribe—a most interesting body of men and women, simple as children, with a faith that it is not easy to shake. Many of them have taken to the Charkha and Khaddar. Congress workers began the work of reformation among them in 1921. Many have given up eating carrion and some have even taken to vegetarianism. The Mundas are another tribe whom I met at Khunti on my way to Ranchi. The scope for work in their midst is inexhaustible. Christian missionaries have been doing valuable service for generations, but in my humble opinion their work suffers, because at the end of it they expect conversion of these simple people to Christianity. I had



the pleasure of seeing some of their schools in these places. It was all pleasing but I could see the coming conflict between the missionaries and the Hindu workers. The latter have no difficulty in making their service commendable to the Hos, the Mundas and the others. How very nice it would be if the missionaries rendered humanitarian service without the ulterior aim of conversion! But I must not reiterate the remarks I made before the Missionary Conference and other Christian bodies in Calcutta. I know that such a revolutionary change in Christian endeavour, as I am advocating, cannot come through any advice, especially from an outsider, however well-meant it may be; it can only come either out of a definite individual conviction or out of some great mass movement among Christians themselves.

*Young India*, 8-10-'25, p. 341

## 51

### THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF PREACHING GOSPEL

(From "Weekly Notes" by M. D.)

A missionary friend who was on a visit to us asked Gandhiji what was the most effective way of preaching the gospel of Christ, for that was his mission. This was Gandhiji's reply:

"To live the gospel is the most effective way—most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. Preaching jars on me and makes no appeal to me, and I get suspicious of missionaries who preach. But I love those who never preach but live the life according to their lights. Their lives are silent, yet most effective testimonies. Therefore, I cannot say what to preach, but I can say that a life of service and uttermost simplicity is the best preaching. If, therefore, you go on serving people and ask them also to serve, they would understand. But you quote instead John 3, 16 and ask them to believe it. That has no appeal to me, and I am sure people will not understand it. Where



there has been acceptance of the gospel through preaching, my complaint is that there has been some motive.”

“But we also see it,” said the friend, “and we try our best to guard against it.”

“But you can’t guard against it. One sordid motive vitiates the whole preaching. It is like a drop of poison which fouls the whole food. Therefore I should do without any preaching at all. A rose does not need to preach. It simply spreads its fragrance. The fragrance is its own sermon. If it had human understanding and if it could engage a number of preachers, the preachers would not be able to sell more roses than the fragrance itself could do. The fragrance of religious and spiritual life is much finer and subtler than that of the rose.”

But all this apparently failed to be of effect, and the reverend gentleman retired with an imprecation (or was it a blessing?):

“Mr. Gandhi, you are getting old, and soon there will come a day when you will be judged, not in *your* righteousness, but in the righteousness of Jesus.”

He evidently did not know that any strength of right and purity that Gandhiji has, he attributes wholly and solely to God.

*Harijan*, 29-3-'35, p. 49 at p. 50

## NO TRUER EVANGELISM THAN LIFE

(From “Weekly Letter” by M. D.)

In reply to a question whether evangelism seemed to him to be out of question in establishing relationships between East and West, Gandhiji said:

“I do say that. But I speak with a mental reservation. I cannot only reconcile myself to—I must recognize—a fact in nature which it is useless to gainsay—I mean proper evangelization. When you feel you have received peace from your particular interpretation of the Bible, you share it with others. But you do not need to give vocal expression to it. Your whole life is more eloquent than your lips. Language

is always an obstacle to the full expression of thought. How, for instance, will you tell a man to read the Bible as you read it, how by word of mouth will you transfer to him the light as you receive it from day to day and moment to moment? Therefore all religions say: 'Your life is your speech.' If you are humble enough you will say you cannot adequately represent your religion by speech or pen.

Q.: But may not one in all humility say, 'I know that my life falls far short of the ideal, let me explain the ideal I stand for'?

A.: No. You bid good-bye to humility the moment you say that life is not adequate and that you must supplement it by speech. Human species need not go to animals and shout to them: 'We are humans.' The animals know them as humans. The language of the soul never lends itself to expression. It rises superior to the body. Language is a limitation of the truth which can be only represented by life.

Q.: How then is experience to be passed on from generation to generation without some articulate expression?

A.: There is no occasion for articulate expression. Life is its own expression. I take the simile of the rose I used years ago. The rose does not need to write a book or deliver a sermon on the scent it sheds all round, nor on the beauty which everyone who has eyes can see. Well, spiritual life is infinitely superior to the beautiful and fragrant rose, and I make bold to say that the moment there is a spiritual expression in life, the surroundings will readily respond. There are passages in the Bible, the Gita, the Bhagvata, the Koran, which eloquently show this. "Wherever," we read, "Krishna appeared, people acted like those possessed." The same thing about Jesus. But to come nearer home, why are people touched as if by magic wherever Jawaharlal goes? They sometimes do not even know he has come, and yet they take sudden fire from the very thought that he is coming. Now there it may not be described as a spiritual influence, but there is a subtle influence and it is unquestionably there, call it by what name you like. They do not want to hear him, they simply want



to see him. And that is natural. You cannot deal with millions in any other way. Spiritual life has greater potency than Marconi waves. When there is no medium between me and my Lord and I simply become a willing vessel for his influences to flow into it, then I overflow as the water of the Ganges at its source. There is no desire to speak when one lives the truth. Truth is most economical of words. There is thus no truer or other evangelism than life."

*Harijan*, 12-12-'36, p. 351 at p. 353

## 53

## WOULD THAT I COULD PERSUADE !

(From "Gandhiji at Colombo Y.M.C.A.")

I claim to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I was cut to pieces, God would give me the strength not to deny Him and to assert that He is. The Muslim says He is and there is no one else. The Christian says the same thing and so the Hindu, and if I may say so, even the Buddhist says the same thing, if in different words. We may each of us be putting our own interpretation on the word God, — God who embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but millions and billions of such globes. How can we, little crawling creatures, so utterly helpless as He has made us, how could we possibly measure his greatness, His boundless love, His infinite compassion, such that He allows man insolently to deny Him, wrangle about Him, and cut the throat of his fellowman? How can we measure the greatness of God who is so forgiving, so divine? Thus though we may utter the same words they have not the same meaning for us all. And hence I say that we do not need to proselytize or do *shuddhi* or *tabligh* through our speech or writing. We can only do it really with our lives. Let them be open books for all to study. Would that I could persuade the missionary friends to take this view of their mission. Then there will be no distrust, no suspicion, no jealousy and no dissensions.

*Young India*, 8-12-'27, p. 413



## SECTION FOUR : HINDUISM

### I. THE MORAL BASIS OF HINDUISM

54

#### ORIGIN OF HINDUISM

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

Gandhiji then referred to a question that was sent by a member of the audience: What is a Hindu? What is the origin of the word? Is there any Hinduism?

Those were pertinent questions for the time. He was no historian, he laid claim to no learning. But he had read in some authentic book on Hinduism that the word 'Hindu' did not occur in the Vedas but when Alexander the Great invaded India, the inhabitants of the country to the East of the Sindhu, which is known by the English-speaking Indians as the Indus, were described as Hindus. The letter 'S' had become 'H' in Greek. The religion of these inhabitants became Hinduism and as they knew it, it was a most tolerant religion. It gave shelter to the early Christians who had fled from persecution, also to the Jews known as Beni-Israil as also to the Parsis. He was proud to belong to that Hinduism which was all-inclusive, and which stood for tolerance. Aryan scholars swore by what they called Vedic religion and Hindustan was otherwise known as Aryavarta. He had no such aspiration. Hindustan of his conception was all sufficing for him. It certainly included the Vedas, but it also included much more. He could detect no inconsistency in declaring that he could, without in any way whatsoever impairing the dignity of Hinduism, pay equal homage to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. Such Hinduism will live as long as the sun shines. Tulasidas has summed it up in one *doha*: "The root of religion is embedded in mercy, whereas egotism is rooted in the love of the body. Tulasi says that mercy should never be abandoned, even though the body perishes."

*Harijan*, 30-11-'47, p. 442, at p. 446

## WHO IS A HINDU ?

## I

(A question and answer thereto from the correspondence of Gandhiji with a correspondent which appeared under the title "Correspondence—A Catechism" is reproduced below.)

*Q.*: You have always termed yourself a 'Hindu'. On the other hand you are not ready to accept the dictates of the Hindu pandits or even their Shastras concerning child-marriage, widow-re-marriage, untouchability, etc. You say in *Young India* dated August 26th : "The Smritis bristle with contradictions. Inspiring verses on self-restraint could not be written at the same time and by the same pen that wrote the verses encouraging the brute in man." The same, I submit, might be said of the many Puranas of the Hindus. Denying the Authority of these books, I do not understand how you can call yourself a "Hindu" (as understood at present) who has an implicit faith in the absurdities and immoralities (derogatory to common sense) preached by some of the Puranas. If you think it is not necessary for a Hindu to believe so, it would be in the service of truth if you were to define the Hindu religion and clear the arguments for your being regarded a Hindu.

You would not say a man is a "Hindu", if he likes to call himself a Hindu, even though he does not follow the doctrine and Shastric injunctions of the latter. Thus if I were to term myself a Christian and say that it is not necessary for a true Christian to have faith in the Bible or even Christ, I could only be termed a pretender.

Besides when you disagree in the matter of Shastras from the Hindus, it requires to be explained why you should prefer to call yourself a Hindu (in spite of the evil associations connected with this word and in spite of the word not being found in any Shashtra of the Hindus even) and not an "Arya" which is a better term even in itself. Besides your teachings as regards the interpretation of the Hindu Shastras have much in common with those of Arya Samaj.



A.: I call myself Sanatani Hindu, because I believe in the Vedas, Upanishads, the Puranas and the writings left by the holy reformers. This belief does not require me to accept as authentic everything that passes as Shastras. I reject everything that contradicts the fundamental principles of morality. I am not required to accept the *ipse dixit* or the interpretations of pundits. Above all I call myself a Sanatani Hindu, so long as the Hindu society in general accepts me as such. In a concrete manner he is a Hindu who believes in God, immortality of the soul, transmigration, the law of Karma and Moksha, and who tries to practise Truth and Ahimsa in daily life, and therefore practises cow-protection in its widest sense and understands and tries to act according to the law of Varna-shrama.

*Young India*, 14-10-'26, p. 356

## II

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "Hindu and Hinduism")

A correspondent who is a patient and diligent reader of *Young India* writes:

"Replying to the catechism of 'An Assistant Executive Engineer' in your issue of 14-10-'26 you say: 'In a concrete manner he is a Hindu who believes in God, immortality of the soul,' etc.

"On reading this I am tempted to confront you with your own writings of nearly two years ago. In *Young India* of April 24, 1924, p. 136, you wrote, 'If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say: search after Truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after Truth.' ""\*

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\*The full extract from the article referred to above which appeared originally under the title "What Is Hinduism?" is as follows:

"It is the good fortune or the misfortune of Hinduism that it has no official creed. In order therefore to protect myself against any misunderstanding, I have said truth and non-violence is my creed. If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say: search after truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe even in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after

The italics in both quotations are mine.

I am surprised that the correspondent does not see the distinction between the two statements. One refers to a Hindu in a concrete manner. Denial of the existence of God is not a characteristic of Hinduism. Millions of Hindus do believe in God. Therefore one may say 'there are Hindus who believe in God etc'. But 'a man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu'. In the second case I have attempted an exhaustive definition. In the first case, I have given a fairly general illustration. I, therefore, see no conflict between the two positions.

*Young India*, 28-10-'26, p. 372

## 56

### TWO ASPECTS OF HINDUISM

(From "The Do or Die Mission" by Pyarelal)

Gandhiji while in detention at Aga Khan Palace once remarked to Shri Pyarelal as under:

"There are two aspects of Hinduism. There is on the one hand the historical Hinduism with its untouchability, superstitious worship of stocks and stones, animal sacrifice and so on. On the other, we have the Hinduism of the Gita, the Upanishads and Patanjali's Yogasutras which is the acme of Ahimsa and oneness of all creation, pure worship of one immanent, formless, imperishable God. Ahimsa which to me is the chief glory of Hinduism has been sought to be explained away by our people as being meant for Sannyasis only. I do not share that view. I have held that it is the way of life and India has to show it to the world."

*Harijan*, 8-12-'46, p. 432

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truth and if today it has become moribund, inactive, irresponsive to growth, it is because we are fatigued and as soon as the fatigue is over, Hinduism will burst forth upon the world with a brilliance perhaps unknown before. Of course, therefore, Hinduism is the most tolerant of all religions. Its creed is all-embracing."



## HINDUISM ABHORS STAGNATION

(Originally appeared under the title "Hinduism of Today")

A correspondent styling himself 'Sanatani Hindu' writes:

"Hinduism of today presents many a curious anomaly. No one cares to study it....Those reputed as the most religious do not follow the Shastras in every detail.

"There is no definite body of doctrines or practices which may be called Sanatana and should be respected and observed as such. Every Hindu regards his own provincial usage as the Sanatana usage."

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The letter presents only one side of the case. There is reason for the correspondent's complaint. But Hinduism is a living organism liable to growth and decay, and subject to the laws of Nature. One and indivisible at the root it has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches. The changes in the seasons affect it. It has its autumn and summer, its winter and spring. The rains nourish and fructify it too. It is and is not based on scriptures. It does not derive its authority from one book. The Gita is universally accepted, but even then it only shows the way. It has hardly any effect on custom. Hinduism is like the Ganges pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganges it is beneficent in its total effect. It takes a provincial form in every province, but the inner substance is retained everywhere. Custom is not religion. Custom may change, but religion will remain unaltered.

Purity of Hinduism depends on the self-restraint of its votaries. Whenever their religion has been in danger, the Hindus have undergone rigorous penance, searched the causes of the danger and devised means for combating them. The Shastras are ever growing. The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas and Itihasas did not arise at one and the

same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore, they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate anew the eternal truths but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'slough of despond'. Because the practice of animal sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time, we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child-marriages? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as out-castes?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth. Every day we add to our knowledge of the powers of Atman, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same. Who has ever known it in its entirety? The Vedas represent the truth, they are infinite. But who has known them in their entirety? What goes today by the name of Vedas are not even a millionth part of the real Veda — the Book of Knowledge. And who knows the entire meaning of even the few books that we have? Rather than wade through these infinite complications, our sages taught us to learn one thing; 'As with the Self, so with the Universe'. It is not possible to scan the universe, as it is to scan the self. Know the self and you know the universe. But even knowledge of the self within presupposes ceaseless striving — not only ceaseless but pure, and pure striving presupposes a pure heart, which in its turn depends on the practice of Yamas\* and Niyamas — the cardinal and casual virtues.

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\* *Yamas*, the cardinal virtues according to Yogashastra are *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession); and the *Niyamas* or the casual virtues are, according to the same authority, *Shaucha* (bodily purity), *Santosha* (Contentment), *Tapas* (forbearance), *Swadhyaya* (Study of scriptures), *Ishwara Pranidhana* (resignation to the Will of God). —M. D.



The practice is not possible without God's grace which presupposes faith and devotion. This is why Tulasidas sang of the glory of Ramanama, that is why the author of the Bhagavata taught the *Dwadashamantra* (*Om Namō Bhagwate Vasudevaya*). To my mind he is a Sanatani Hindu who can repeat this *mantra* from the heart. All else is a bottomless pit, as the sage Akho\* has said.

*Young India*, 8-4-'26, p. 131

## 58

## WHAT HAS HINDUISM DONE FOR US?

(From "Brahmana-Non-Brahmana Question"—by M. D.)

*Q.*: We see you swear by Hinduism. May we know what Hinduism has done for us? Is it not a legacy of ugly and superstitious practices?

Gandhiji replied to the above question which was put to him after his talk at one of the places during his tour in South India as follows:

"I thought I had made it clear already. Varnashramadharma itself is a unique contribution of Hinduism to the world. Hinduism has saved us from *bhaya*, i.e. peril. If Hinduism had not come to my rescue, the only course for me would have been suicide. I remain a Hindu because Hinduism is a heaven which makes the world worth living in. From Hinduism was born Buddhism. What we see today is not pure Hinduism, but often a parody of it. Otherwise it would require no pleading from me in its behalf, but would speak for itself, even as if I was absolutely pure I would not need to speak to you. God does not speak with His tongue, and man, in the measure that he comes near God, becomes like God. Hinduism teaches me that my body is a limitation of the power of the soul within.

"Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism has made still more marvellous discoveries in things of religion, of the spirit, of the soul. But we have no eye for these great

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\* A poet-seer of Gujarat.

and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not enamoured of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom had prevented India from progressing along those lines so that it might fulfil its special mission of resisting the onrush of materialism. After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilization. Cast a look round you. Where is Rome and where is Greece? Can you find today anywhere the Italy of Gibbon, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy? Go to Greece. Where is the world-famous Attic civilization? Then come to India, let one go through the most ancient records and then look round you and you would be constrained to say, 'Yes, I see here ancient India still living.' True, there are dung-heaps too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has survived is that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.

“Among its many contributions the idea of man's identity with the dumb creation is a unique one. To me cow-worship is a great idea which is capable of expansion. Its freedom from the modern proselytization is also to me a precious thing. It needs no preaching. It says, 'Live the life.' It is my business, it is your business to live the life, and then we will leave its influence on ages. Then take its contribution in men; Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, not to speak of the more modern names, have left their impress on Hinduism. Hinduism is by no means a spent force or a dead religion.

“Then there is the contribution of the four Ashramas, again a unique contribution. There is nothing like it in the whole world. The Catholics have the order of celibates corresponding to *Brahmacharis*, but not as an institution, whereas in India every boy had to go through the first Ashrama. What a grand conception it was ! Today our eyes are dirty, thoughts dirtier and bodies dirtiest of all, because we are denying Hinduism.



“There is yet another thing I have not mentioned. Max Muller said forty years ago that it was dawning on Europe that transmigration is not a theory, but a fact. Well, it is entirely the contribution of Hinduism.

“Today Varnashramadharma and Hinduism are misinterpreted and denied by its votaries. The remedy is not destruction, but correction. Let us reproduce in ourselves the true Hindu spirit, and then ask whether it satisfies the soul or not.”

*Young India*, 24-11-'27, p. 390 at p. 396

## 59

### WHY SHOULD A HINDU CLING TO HINDUISM ?

(From “True Inwardness”)

*Q.*: What is the speciality of Hinduism for which a Hindu need cling to it?

*A.*: This is an invidious question. Perhaps it is also profitless. But I must answer it, if only to show what I mean by religion. The closest, though very incomplete, analogy for religion I can find is marriage. It is or used to be an indissoluble tie. Much more so is the tie of religion. And just as a husband does not remain faithful to his wife, or wife to her husband, because either is conscious of some exclusive superiority of the other over the rest of his or her sex but because of some indefinable but irresistible attraction, so does one remain irresistibly faithful to one's own religion and find full satisfaction in such adhesion. And just as a faithful husband does not need, in order to sustain his faithfulness, to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider others to be inferior to his own. To pursue the analogy still further, even as faithfulness to one's wife does not presuppose blindness to her shortcomings, so does not faithfulness to one's religion presuppose blindness to the shortcomings of that religion. Indeed faithfulness, not blind adherence, demand a keener perception of shortcomings and therefore a livelier sense of the proper remedy for their removal. Taking the view I

do of religion, it is unnecessary for me, to examine the beauties of Hinduism. The reader may rest assured that I am not likely to remain Hindu, if I was not conscious of its many beauties. Only for my purpose they need not be exclusive. My approach to other religions, therefore, is never as a fault-finding critic but as a devotee hoping to find the like beauties in the other religions and wishing to incorporate in my own the good, I may find in them and miss in mine.

*Harijan*, 12-8-'33, p. 4

60

## THE CHIEF VALUE OF HINDUISM

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

An American professor in Comparative Theology on a visit to India to study Indian religions intelligently, asked Gandhiji to tell her in a nut-shell the chief value of Hinduism, as she had been told "that Gandhiji was the life and soul of Hinduism". "It is hardly wise," she said, "to rest content to teach what you can out of books. One must meet the true representatives of these living religions."

Replying to her Gandhiji said: "The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that *all* life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, i.e. all life coming from the one universal source, call it Allah, God or Parameshwara. There is in Hinduism a scripture called Vishnusahasranama which simply means 'one thousand names of God'. These one thousand names do not mean that God is limited to those names, but that He has as many names as you can possibly give Him. You may give Him as many names as you like, provided it is one God without a second, whose name you are invoking. That also means that He is nameless too.

"This unity of *all* life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not to human beings alone but says that it is possible for all God's creatures. It may be that it is not possible, save through the human form, but that does not make man the lord of creation. It makes



him the servant of God's creation. Now when we talk of brotherhood of man, we stop there, and feel that all other life is there for man to exploit for his own purposes. But Hinduism excludes all exploitation. There is no limit whatsoever to the measure of sacrifice that one may make in order to realize this oneness with all life, but certainly the immensity of the ideal sets a limit to your wants. That you will see, is the antithesis of the position of the modern civilization which says: 'Increase your wants'. Those who hold that belief think that increase of wants means an increase of knowledge whereby you understand the Infinite better. On the contrary Hinduism rules out indulgence and multiplication of wants as these hamper one's growth to the ultimate identity with the Universal Self."

*Harijan*, 26-12-'36, p. 363 at p. 364

## 61

### DR. AMBEDKAR'S INDICTMENT OF HINDUISM

(Originally appeared under the title "Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment-II")

(Dr. Ambedkar was to have presided in May 1936 at the annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore. But the conference itself was cancelled because Dr. Ambedkar's address was found by the Reception Committee to be unacceptable. The author of the address had indicted Hinduism and quoted chapter and verse in proof of his threefold indictment—inhuman conduct itself, the unabashed justification for it on the part of the perpetrators, and the subsequent discovery that the justification was warranted by their scriptures. The questions that Dr. Ambedkar's indictment suggested were:

1. What are the scriptures?
2. Are all the printed texts to be regarded as an integral part of them or is any part of them to be rejected as unauthorized interpolations?
3. What is the answer of such accepted and expurgated scriptures on the question of untouchability, caste, equality of status, inter-dining and inter-marriages?

This all were ably examined by Dr. Ambedkar in his address but there were manifest flaws in Dr. Ambedkar's thesis. A statement of these flaws and Gandhiji's answer to the said three questions are given in the following article.)

The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Puranas including Ramayana and Mahabharata are the Hindu scriptures. Nor is this a finite list. Every age or even generation has added to the list. It follows, therefore, that everything printed or even found handwritten is not scripture. The Smritis, for instance, contain much that can never be accepted as the word of God. Thus many of the texts that Dr. Ambedkar quotes from the Smritis cannot be accepted as authentic. The scriptures properly so-called can only be concerned with eternal verities and must appeal to any conscience, i.e. any heart whose eyes of understanding are opened. Nothing can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or be capable of being spiritually experienced. And even when you have an expurgated edition of the scriptures, you will need their interpretation. Who is the best interpreter? Not learned men surely. Learning there must be. But religion does not live by it. It lives in the experiences of its saints and seers, in their lives and sayings. When all the most learned commentators of the scriptures are utterly forgotten, the accumulated experience of the sages and saints will abide and be an inspiration for ages to come.

Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. Varna and Ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The callings of a Brahmana — spiritual teacher — and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries equal merit before



God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to their livelihood and no more. Indeed one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law. Living in Segaoon with its population of 600, I do not find a great disparity between the earnings of different tradesmen including Brahmanas. I find too that real Brahmanas are to be found even in these degenerate days who are living on alms freely given to them and are giving freely of what they have of spiritual treasures. It would be wrong and improper to judge the law of Varna by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a Varna whilst they openly commit a breach of its only operative rule. Arrogation of a superior status by any of the Varnas over another is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the law of Varna to warrant a belief in untouchability. (The essence of Hinduism is contained in its enunciation of one and only God as Truth and its bold acceptance of Ahimsa as the law of the human family.)

I am aware that my interpretation of Hinduism will be disputed by many besides Dr. Ambedkar. That does not affect my position. It is an interpretation by which I have lived nearly half a century and according to which I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to regulate my life.

In my opinion the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made in his address is to pick out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value and the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith they so woefully misrepresent. Judged by the standard applied by Dr. Ambedkar, every known living faith will probably fail.

In his able address, the learned Doctor has overproved his case. Can a religion that was professed by Chaitanya, Jnanadeva, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda and a host of others who might be easily mentioned, be so utterly devoid of merit as is made out in Dr. Ambedkar's address? A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best

it might have produced. For that and that alone can be used as the standard to aspire to, if not to improve upon.

*Harijan*, 18-7-36, p. 180

## 62

## AS OTHERS SEE US

Here is a letter which has been lying on my file for sometime:

“Your attitude towards religious conversion and particularly the hope you entertain for the Depressed Classes within the fold of Hinduism overlooks the prevalent practices of Hinduism as it exists in India today. It is impossible not to acknowledge the beauty and the sublimity of Hinduism expounded by Vivekananda and Sir S. Radhakrishnan. But is that the Hinduism that is taught to the masses of India or practised by the heads of Hindu religion? What are the millions of the poor Indian people—starving millions as you call them—living in seven lakhs of villages seeking? Their first need is proper food, shelter and clothing so that they may be raised above the level of animals. Are the Depressed Classes anxious for temple entry?

Any religion is judged by its fruits. Here is a contrast. Take the case of the Christian religion, whether Roman Catholics or Protestants. The funds that are collected from the rich and poor are carefully accounted for and repaid in the form of medical and educational service. Religious worship is open to all alike. The number of schools, colleges, dispensaries, hospitals, and orphanages admirably served by their religious institution bear eloquent testimony to the quality of faith that is in them. It is not a theology and philosophy which they possess but the self-sacrificing service which they render in abundant measure towards all that is a contrast to the service rendered by the temples and *maths*. What are the uses of the wealth of temples and *maths*? Are not these weapons of superstition and oppression? The heads of these *maths* live princely lives with vast endowments, and when they care to stir out there is a huge retinue of palanquins, cars, elephants, camels and a host of disciples descending on unhappy villages and towns, like locusts, for further collections. Their disciples who are priests are spread like spies throughout the districts, to collect



money from the followers of various faiths, Madhvas, Lingayats, Shaivaites and so forth, under pain of excommunication or ostracism. I am informed that there are regular lawyers to collect dues and serve the interests of these religious heads, swamis and gurus. This state of affairs is an oppression worse than popery in its worst days. Not merely the accumulated wealth and the annual collections, which in all these *maths* must amount to several crores, are never properly accounted for, but this gigantic system of ghastly exploitation continues to be supported by the most intellectual leaders of the people as if Hindu society will break up by questioning it. This is practical Hinduism. Why should there be any surprise that the Depressed Classes alone should revolt against a system which denies equal rights to worship the Deity but keeps them also in perpetual social excommunication? Why is it that no one ventures to question the priestly oppression, this draining away annually the wealth of the people without any service whatever? While the millions are hungry, ignorant and illiterate, even a small proportion of wealth of the *maths* and the temples is not turned to relieve human misery. Hinduism is so spiritual that it will not do it. Are the Hindu gods so ravenous that they require such an annual collection with complete indifference to those who give it? I doubt!

While the produce of the land is steadily drained away as land revenue on the one side by the State and religious extortion on the other, is it any wonder millions are underfed and poverty-stricken? Is it any relief to them to be told to work harder and more systematically in their leisure months after the harvest? What is taken in money and in kind should return to them in the form of service they most need. If the poor unfortunate masses of India are not supported by the wealth of the Hindu *maths* to shake off their illiteracy, ignorance, hook-worm, malaria, leprosy, diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera and plague—physical ills which they cannot at present get over without relief—they will never be capable of bringing greater intelligence to bear upon the resources of Nature. It is exploitation by religious heads that has crushed the people, and the money-lender and the State combined have finished the process. It is not mere work and harder work, and the variety of cottage industries that these half-dead, half-living masses require, but more vocational schools and dispensaries, maternity and child-welfare centres and better food. They have paid

for it in full and have been cheated out of the services they ought to get from religion and the State. When will the children of the villages have the light of morning in their eyes? In the process of evolution, to think that all that is dross in Hinduism will drop off like surface excrescence is as much as hoping that all that is vile in the present Government will also do the same by just wishing for it. If the State is not moved very easily by your Herculean endeavours, Hinduism requires a far more drastic purge as it has been established some thousands of years longer than this alien Government. I would rather love the State that renders services of all sorts for the revenue collected than this religion which does nothing.

Bishop and priests of the Christian religion, in spite of the fierce criticism levelled against them in this land and every other country, render humanitarian service unequalled by any other class of human beings who follow any other faith or no faith, and are approachable to all people. Christian missions, far from being wealthy, have become poorer and lost all their Western supporters who today acknowledge the greatness of Hinduism and challenge them to go forth and serve their fellowmen with their own money. If the humanitarian service of the Christian heads are acknowledged, it is far better to give to them some of the resources that are now misused so that with their honest and excellent organization they may expand their humane service which the masses sorely need. What has Hinduism done for the villages, the most depressing morbid places under the Sun? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! Government officials require *bhattha* to visit these places, and no wonder. One would welcome cheerfully the mechanical civilization of the West, but even that under Hindu hands becomes as vile as Bombay *chawls*. Anyone with open unprejudiced eyes can see it. You have no objection to accept missionary humanitarian service, and yet will not consider what form of service Hinduism renders with its accumulated wealth in temples and *maths*. When these religious institutions serve the poor regardless of caste, creed or community, instead of exploiting their abysmal superstition, Hinduism will really begin to live."

It is good to see ourselves as others see us. Try as we may, we are never able to know ourselves fully as we are, especially the evil side of us. This we can do only if we are not angry with our critics but will take in good



part whatever they might have to say. Any way I propose to examine the foregoing criticism as dispassionately as I can. The grave limitations of Hinduism as it is seen today in practice must be admitted. Many *maths* and their administration are undoubtedly a disgrace to Hinduism. The money that is poured into some of them does not return to the worshippers in the form of service. This state of things must be ended or mended.

Humanitarian work done by Christian missions must also be admitted.

But these admissions of mine must not be interpreted to mean endorsement of the deductions of the writer. Economic and educational relief is required by most poor Indians in common with Harijans. But the latter suffer from special disabilities. It is not a question of what disabilities they resent. It is the duty of the so-called superior Hindus to break the chains that bind the Harijans even though they may hug them. The admission by the writer of the sublimity of Hinduism as expounded by Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan should have led to his discovery of its percolation down to the masses. I make bold to say that in spite of the crudeness which one sees among the villagers, class considered, in all that is good in human nature they compare favourably with any villagers in the world. The testimony is borne out by majority of travelers who from the times of Huen Tsang down to the present times have recorded their impressions. The innate culture that the villages of India show, the art which one sees in the homes of the poor, the restraint with which the villagers conduct themselves, are surely due to the religion that has bound them together from time immemorial.

In his zeal to belittle Hinduism, the writer ignores the broad fact that Hinduism has produced a race of reformers who have successfully combated prejudices, superstitions and abuses. Without any drum-beating Hinduism has devised a system of relief of the poor which has been the envy of many foreign admirers. I myself feel that it leaves much to be desired. It has its evil side. But from the philanthropic standpoint it has wholly justified itself. It is not the Indian habit to advertize charities through printed reports

and the like. But he who runs may see the free kitchens and free medical relief given along indigenous lines.

The writer belittles village work. It betrays gross ignorance. If the *maths* and the revenue offices were extinguished and free schools were opened, the people would not be cured of their inertia. *Maths* must be reformed, the revenue system must be overhauled, free primary schools must be established in every village. But starvation will not disappear because people pay no revenue and *maths* are destroyed and schools spring up in every village. The greatest education in the villages consists in the villagers being taught or induced to work methodically and profitably all the year round whether it be on the land or at industries connected with the villages.

Lastly, my correspondent seems to resent acceptance by us of humanitarian services by missionaries. Will he have an agitation led against these missionary institutions? Why should they have non-Christian aid? They are established with the view of weaning Indians from their ancestral faith even as expounded by Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan. Let them isolate the institutions from the double purpose. It will be time enough then to expect non-Christian aid. The critic must be aware of the fact that even as it is, some of these institutions do get non-Christian aid. My point is that there should be no complaint if they do not receive such aid so long as they have an aim which is repugnant to the non-Christian sentiment.

*Harijan*, 6-3-'37, p. 28



## THE ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

(After the proclamation by the Maharaja of Travancore throwing temples open to Harijans was issued in 1936, Gandhiji went on a tour of Travancore and addressed several public meetings during his tour. At the public meeting in Quilon Gandhiji summed up the credal belief of Hinduism in an Upanishadic *mantra*, and thereafter gave lucid and simple commentaries on the numerous implications of that all comprehensive *mantra*. Accounts of some of these speeches which appeared in "Weekly Letter" by M. D. are given below.)

## I

(Speech at Quilon)

Let me for a few moments consider what Hinduism consists of, what it is that has fired so many saints about whom we have historical record. Why has it contributed so many philosophers to the world? What is it in Hinduism that has so enthused its devotees for centuries? Did they see untouchability in Hinduism and still enthuse over it? In the midst of my struggle against untouchability, I have been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalma*, they said, that we find in Islam, nor have we 3-16 John of the Bible. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the most matter-of-fact among them? Some have said, and not without good reason, the Gayatri answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the Gayatri *mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then as you are aware, I have, for years past, been swearing by the Bhagavadgita, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my *Kamadhenu*, my guide, my open sesame, on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me. But it is not a book that I can place before the whole of this audience. It requires a prayerful

study before the *Kamadhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

But I have fixed upon one *mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the Ishopanishad. I read it years ago, with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Ishopanishad were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

Now this *mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part is ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् । It means, as I would translate, 'All this that we see in this great universe is pervaded by God.' Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them: तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः । I divide these into two and translate them thus: 'Renounce it and enjoy it.' There is another rendering which means the same thing, though: 'Enjoy what He gives you.' Even so you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् । which means: 'Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession.' All the other *mantras* of that ancient Upanishad are a commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *mantra*. As I read the *mantra* in the light of the Gita or the Gita in the light of the *mantra* I find that the Gita is a commentary on this *mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the Socialist and the Communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true—and I hold it to be true—you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the universe? The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must



believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is, therefore, a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought: Do not covet anybody's possession. The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter. No doubt it will not satisfy the aspiration of him who does not believe in God and His undisputed sovereignty. It is no idle thing that the Maharaja of Travancore is called *Padmanabhadra*. It is a great thought, we know that God Himself has taken the title of *Dasanudas*—servant of servants. If all the princes would call themselves servants of God, they would be correctly describing themselves, but they cannot be servants of God unless they are servants of the people. And if zamindars and moneyed men and all who have possessions would treat themselves as trustees and perform the act of renunciation that I have described, this world would indeed be a blessed world to live in.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37, p. 403 at p. 404

## II

(From the speech at Haripad)

At this meeting I would love to detain you for a few minutes on the message of Hinduism I gave to the meeting in Quilon last night. I ventured at that meeting to say that the whole of Hinduism could be summed up in the first verse of Ishopanishad. I suggested then that if all other Hindu scriptures happened to be reduced to ashes and to go out of the memory of men and if only that one

verse were to abide with us, the destruction would be no loss. Hinduism would even then remain with us. The original Sanskrit of the *mantra* is perhaps as easy as anybody learning Sanskrit could possibly wish. This Upanishad enjoys the reputation of being part of the original Vedas. It is the shortest Upanishad known to us. But as I have said if we had only the first verse of that Upanishad remaining with us, it would be enough to supply all our wants. Let me repeat that *mantra* in my faulty Sanskrit pronunciation:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।

तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथाः मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ॥

Those who know a little bit of Sanskrit will find that there is nothing abstruse there that you find in other Vedic *mantras*, and its meaning is simply this: All that there is in this universe, great or small, including the tiniest atom, is pervaded by God, known as Creator or Lord. Isha means the Ruler, and He who is the Creator naturally by very right becomes the Ruler too. And here in this verse the seer has chosen no other epithet for the Deity but that of the Ruler, and he has excepted nothing from His jurisdiction. He says, everything that we see is pervaded by the Deity, and from that naturally the other parts of the *mantra* follow. Thus he says, renounce everything, i.e. everything that is on this universe, the whole of the universe, and not only this tiny globe of ours, renounce it. He asks us to renounce it as we are such insignificant atoms that if we had any idea of possession it would seem ludicrous. And then, says the Rishi, the reward of renunciation is भुञ्जीथाः i.e. enjoyment of all you need. But there is a meaning about the word 'enjoy'—you might as well say use, eat, etc.—but it means that you may not take more than is necessary for your growth. Therefore, this enjoyment or use is limited by two conditions. One is the act of renunciation or, as the author of the Bhagavat would say, enjoy in the spirit of कृष्णार्पणमस्तु सर्वम् । And every day in the morning everyone who believes in Bhagavatdharma has to dedicate his thoughts, words and deeds to Krishna, and not until he has performed that daily act of renunciation or dedication has he the right of touching anything or drinking even a cup of water. And when a man has performed that



act of renunciation and dedication, he derives from that act the right of eating, drinking, clothing and housing himself to the extent necessary for his daily life. Therefore, take it as you like, either in the sense that the enjoyment or use is the reward of renunciation, or that the renunciation is the condition of enjoyment, renunciation is essential for our very existence, for our soul. And as if that condition given in the *mantra* was incomplete, the Rishi hastened to complete it by adding: 'Do not covet what belongs to another.' Now I suggest to you that the whole of the philosophy or religion found in any part of the world is contained in this *mantra*, and it excludes everything contrary to it. According to the canons of interpretation, anything that is inconsistent with Shruti—and the Ishopanishad is a Shruti—is to be rejected altogether.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37, p. 407

### III

(From the speech at Kottayam)

Latterly I have been endeavouring to describe to vast assemblages of men and women I have addressed what I regard as the essence of Hinduism, and I have been suggesting to them one incredibly simple *mantra* of the Ishopanishad, and as you know it is one of the Upanishads that enjoy the sanctity of the Vedas. The very first verse of the Ishopanishad means simply this: God pervades everything that is to be found in this universe down to the tiniest atom. The *mantra* describes God as the Creator, the Ruler, and the Lord. The seer to whom this *mantra* or verse was revealed was not satisfied with the magnificent statement that God was to be found everywhere. But he went further and said: 'Since God pervades everything nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. God is the undisputed, unchallengeable Master of everything you possess.' And so when a person who calls himself a Hindu goes through the process of regeneration or a second birth, as Christians would call it, he has to perform a dedication or renunciation of all that he has in ignorance called his own property. And then when he has performed this act of dedication or renunciation, he is told that he will win a reward in the

shape of God taking good care of what he will require for food, clothing or housing. Therefore, the condition of enjoyment or use of the necessities of life is their dedication or renunciation. And that dedication or renunciation has got to be done from day to day, lest we may in this busy world forget the central fact of life. And to crown all, the seer says: 'Covet not anybody's riches.' I suggest to you that the truth that is embedded in this very short *mantra* is calculated to satisfy the highest cravings of every human being—whether they have reference to this world or to the next. I have in my search of the scriptures of the world found nothing to add to this *mantra*. Looking back upon all the little I have read of the scriptures—it is precious little I confess—I feel that everything good in all the scriptures is derived from this *mantra*. If it is universal brotherhood—not only brotherhood of all human beings, but of all living beings—I find it in this *mantra*. If it is unshakable faith in the Lord and Master—and all the adjectives you can think of—I find it in this *mantra*. If it is the idea of complete surrender to God and of the faith that He will supply all that I need, then again I say I find it in this *mantra*. Since He pervades every fibre of my being and of all of you, I derive from it the doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth and it should satisfy the cravings of all philosophical communists. This *mantra* tells me that I cannot hold as mine anything that belongs to God, and if my life and that of all who believe in this *mantra* has to be a life of perfect dedication, it follows that it will have to be a life of continual service of our fellow creatures. This, I say, is my faith and should be the faith of all who call themselves Hindus.

*Harijan*, 30-1-'37, p. 409



## MUCH IN LITTLE

“In Mr. Mahadev Desai’s book on the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation, I find your speeches made in several places in Travancore. You have spoken of the Ishopanishad and said that if the first verse alone survived and all the rest of the Hindu scriptures were destroyed, it would alone save religion from extinction. Perhaps, you know that that verse was a turning point in the life of Devendranath Tagore, the Poet’s father. Young Devendranath was in a mood of great depression when his father died leaving the family estate highly encumbered. One day while in this mood a piece of printed paper was wafted by a passing breeze to where he was sitting. He picked it up. It was in Sanskrit which he had not learnt then. He took it to the family pandit who read it out. It was the first verse of the Ishopanishad. ‘Nectar poured into my soul’, says the Maharshi in his autobiography.

“The phrase about enjoying by renunciation puzzled me for long. One day (or night to be correct) it flashed on me that the phrase but expressed a daily experience. What greater enjoyment is there than renouncing something one values to one—person or cause—which one holds dear?”

The above letter from Shri K. Natarajan was received by me about three months ago. I had hoped to deal with it in these columns much earlier but could not. Nothing, however, is lost for the subject matter of the letter is an evergreen. I try to the utmost of my ability to live the meaning that, in my ungrammatical way, I have ascribed to the *shloka*. Not being a reader of books, I never knew the instance that Shri Natarajan quotes from Maharshi Devendra’s life. It fortifies my belief that the first *mantra* of Ishopanishad is all that undiluted Hinduism—in other words, for me, religion—can have to give. The recitation of the eighteen chapters of the Gita is finished in one week at the morning prayer and so it has gone on now for some years from week to week. The Gita is a commentary on the first verse of the Ishopanishad. And I feel, not without diffidence, that the interpretation that flashed on Shri

Natarajan's mind reveals but the partial truth. As I understand it, his interpretation is only the well-worn doctrine of self-sacrifice which is undoubtedly a common enough experience. Take only one instance. Many a mother sacrifices all for her children. But the *mantra* referred to here was not revealed to confirm the truth of that practice, well known even during the remote times when it is said to have been given. To live up to that verse means the new birth enunciated in the New Testament or *Brahma-samarpana* (dedication to God) as taught in Hinduism. The verse, therefore, seems to me to mean only one thing. Recognize that everything you fancy you have is God's and from God and take only what you really need for life. In other words, in the language of the Gita it teaches the doctrine of uttermost detachment. Then only is life worth living.

*Harijan*, 23-6-'46, p. 189

## MY CLAIM

(From "Friendly Discussion Always Welcome" which appeared in "Notes")

I am no Sanskrit scholar, but I know sufficient to detect errors in translations that may be given to me. I claim to have read the Shastras to my satisfaction, and I claim to have endeavoured from my youth upwards to put into practice the fundamental precepts of the Shastras. Thus I have no hesitation in putting before the public, with the utmost confidence, the conclusions I have reached regarding certain fundamentals of Hinduism.

*Harijan*, 12-1-'34, p. 3



## WHY I AM A HINDU

An American friend who subscribes herself as a life-long friend of India writes:

“As Hinduism is one of the prominent religions of the East, and as you have made a study of Christianity and Hinduism, and on the basis of that study, have announced that you are a Hindu, I beg leave to ask of you if you will do me the favour to give me your reasons for that choice. Hindus and Christians alike realize that man’s chief need is to know God and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Believing that Christ was a revelation of God, Christians of America have sent to India thousands of their sons and daughters to tell the people of India about Christ. Will you in return kindly give us your interpretation of Hinduism and make a comparison of Hinduism with the teachings of Christ? I will be deeply grateful for this favour.”

I have ventured at several missionary meetings to tell English and American missionaries that if they could have refrained from ‘telling’ India about Christ and had merely lived the life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the Mount, India, instead of suspecting them, would have appreciated their living in the midst of her children and directly profited by their presence. Holding this view, I can ‘tell’ American friends nothing about ‘Hinduism’ by way of ‘return’. I do not believe in telling others of their faith, especially with a view to conversion. Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating.

Nor do I consider myself fit to interpret Hinduism except through my own life. And if I may not interpret Hinduism through my written word, I may not compare it with Christianity. The only thing it is possible for me therefore to do is say as briefly as I can, why I am a Hindu.

Believing as I do in the influence of heredity, being born in a Hindu family, I have remained a Hindu. I should reject it, if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth. On examination I have found it

to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me in as much it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all the other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths. Non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism. (I do not regard Jainism or Buddhism as separate from Hinduism). Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives. Its worship of the cow is, in my opinion, its unique contribution to the evolution of humanitarianism. It is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and, therefore, sacredness, of all life. The great belief in transmigration is a direct consequence of that belief. Finally the discovery of the law of Varnashrama is a magnificent result of the ceaseless search for truth. I must not burden this article with definitions of the essentials sketched here, except to say that the present ideas of cow-worship and Varnashrama are a caricature of what, in my opinion, the originals are. The curious may see the definitions of cow-worship and Varnashrama in the previous numbers of *Young India*. I hope to have to say on Varnashrama in the near future. In this all too brief a sketch I have mentioned what occur to me to be the outstanding features of Hinduism that keep me in its fold.

*Young India*, 20-10-'27, p. 352



## HINDUISM AS I UNDERSTAND

(Extract from "Cow Protection")

I claim to be a Sanatani Hindu. People may laugh and say that to call myself a Sanatani Hindu when I eat and drink from the hands of Musalmans and Christians, keep an untouchable girl in my house as my daughter and do not hesitate to quote the Bible, is nothing short of doing violence to language. But I would still adhere to my claim, for I have faith in me which tells me that a day would come—may be most probably after I am dead and no longer present in this world in the flesh to bear witness—when my critics would recognize their error and admit the justness of my claim. Pretty long while ago, I once wrote in *Young India* an article on Hinduism, which I consider to be one of my most thoughtful writings on the subject. The definition of Hinduism which I gave in it is probably the clearest that I have ever given. After defining a Hindu as one who believed in the Vedas and Upanishads, recited the Gayatri and subscribed to the doctrine of rebirth and transmigration etc., I added that so far as the popular notion of Hinduism was concerned, its distinguishing feature was belief in cow protection and reverence for the cow. I do not want to be told as to what Hindus ten thousand years ago did. I know there are scholars who tell us that cow-sacrifice is mentioned in the Vedas. I remember when I was a high school student we read a sentence in our Sanskrit text-book to the effect that the Brahmanas of old used to eat beef. That exercised my mind greatly and I used to wonder and ask myself whether what was written could be after all true. But as I grew up the conviction slowly forced itself upon me that even if the text on which these statements were based was actually part of the Vedas, the interpretation put upon it could not be correct. I had conceived of another way out of the difficulty. This was purely for personal satisfaction. 'If the Vedic text under reference was incapable of bearing any other interpretation than the literal,' I said to myself,

'the Brahmanas who were alleged to be eating beef had the power to bring the slaughtered animals back to life again.' But that is neither here nor there. The speculation does not concern the general mass of the Hindus. I do not claim to be a Vedic scholar. I have read Sanskrit scriptures largely in translation. A layman like myself, therefore, can hardly have any *locus standi* in a controversy like this. But I have confidence in myself. Therefore I do not hesitate to freely express to others my opinions based on my inner experience. It may be that we may not be all able to agree as to the exact meaning and significance of cow protection. For Hinduism does not rest on the authority of one book or one prophet; nor does it possess a common creed—like the Kalma of Islam—acceptable to all. That renders a common definition of Hinduism a bit difficult, but therein lies its strength also. For, it is this special feature that has given to Hinduism its inclusive and assimilative character and made its gradual, silent evolution possible. Go to any Hindu child and he would tell you that cow protection is the supreme duty of every Hindu and that any one who does not believe in it hardly deserves the name of a Hindu.

*Young India*, 29-1-'25, p. 37

## MY MEANING OF SANATAN HINDUISM

(Originally appeared under the title "Hinduism")

In dealing with the problem of untouchability during the Madras tour, I have asserted my claim to being a Sanatani Hindu with greater emphasis than hitherto, and yet there are things which are commonly done in the name of Hinduism, which I disregard. I have no desire to be called a Sanatani Hindu or any other if I am not such. And I have certainly no desire to steal in a reform or an abuse under cover of a great faith.

It is, therefore, necessary for me once for all distinctly to give my meaning of Sanatana Hinduism. The word 'Sanatana' I use in its natural sense.



I call myself a Sanatani Hindu because,

(1) I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in *avatars* and rebirth,

(2) I believe in the Varnashramadharma in a sense in my opinion strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude sense,

(3) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular,

(4) I do not disbelieve in idol-worship.

The reader will note that I have purposely refrained from using the word 'divine origin' in reference to the Vedas or any other scriptures. For I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Zend-Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas. My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first-hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of the scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense. I do most emphatically repudiate the claim (if they advance any such) of the present Shankaracharyas and Shastris to give a correct interpretation of the Hindu scriptures. On the contrary, I believe that our present knowledge of these books is in a most chaotic state. I believe implicitly in the Hindu aphorism, that no one truly knows the Shastras who has not attained perfection in Innocence (Ahimsa), Truth (Satya) and Self-control (Brahmacharya) and who has not renounced all acquisition or possession of wealth. I believe in the institution of gurus, but in this age millions must go without a guru, because it is a rare thing to find a combination of perfect purity and perfect learning. But one need not despair of ever knowing the truth of one's religion, because the fundamentals of Hinduism as of every great religion are unchangeable, and easily understood. Every Hindu believes in God and His oneness; in rebirth and salvation. But that which distinguishes

Hinduism from every other religion is its cow protection, more than its Varnashrama.

Varnashrama is in my opinion inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his Varna by choice. Not to abide by one's Varna is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four divisions are all-sufficing.

I do not believe that inter-dining or even inter-marriage necessarily deprives a man of his status that his birth has given him. The four divisions define a man's calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower. All are born to serve God's creation, a Brahmana with his knowledge, a Kshatriya with his power of protection, a Vaishya with his commercial ability and a Shudra with bodily labour. This however does not mean that a Brahmana, for instance, is absolved from bodily labour, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a Brahmana predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing, again, to prevent the Shudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only, he will best serve with his body and need not envy others their special qualities for service. But a Brahmana who claims superiority by right of knowledge falls and has no knowledge. And so with the others who pride themselves upon their special qualities. Varnashrama is self-restraint and conservation and economy of energy.

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Unfortunately today Hinduism seems to consist merely in eating and not eating. Once I horrified a pious Hindu by taking toast at a Musalman's house. I saw that he was pained to see me pouring milk into a cup handed by a Musalman friend, but his anguish knew no bounds when he saw me taking toast at the Musalman's hands. Hinduism is in danger of losing its substance if it resolves itself into a matter of elaborate rules as to what and with whom to eat. Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs,



and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody, but living in the fear of God is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things but blaspheming God in every one of his acts.

The central fact of Hinduism is however cow protection. Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world. And Hinduism will live so long as there are Hindus to protect the cow.

The way to protect is to die for her. It is a denial of Hinduism and Ahimsa to kill a human being to protect a cow. Hindus are enjoined to protect the cow by their *tapasya*, by self-purification, by self-sacrifice. The present day cow protection has degenerated into a perpetual feud with the Musalmans, whereas cow protection means conquering the Musalmans by our love. A Musalman friend sent me sometime ago a book detailing the inhumanities practised by us on the cow and her progeny. How we bleed her to take the last drop of milk from her, how we starve her to emaciation, how we ill-treat the calves, how we deprive them of their portion of milk, how cruelly we treat the oxen, how we castrate them, how we beat them, how we overload them. If they had speech, they would bear witness to our crimes against them which would

stagger the world. By every act of cruelty to our cattle, we disown God and Hinduism. I do not know that the condition of the cattle in any other part of the world is so bad as in unhappy India. We may not blame the Englishman for this. We may not plead poverty in our defence. Criminal negligence is the only cause of the miserable condition of our cattle. Our *panjarapols*, though they are an answer to our instinct of mercy, are a clumsy demonstration of its execution. Instead of being model dairy farms and great profitable national institutions, they are merely depots for receiving decrepit cattle.

Hindus will not be judged by their *tilaks*, not by the correct chanting of *mantras*, not by their pilgrimages, not by their most punctilious observance of caste rules but by their ability to protect the cow. Whilst professing the religion of cow protection, we have enslaved the cow and her progeny, and have become slaves ourselves.

It will now be understood why I consider myself a Sanatani Hindu....

I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. Not that she has no faults. I dare say she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me so much as the music of the Gita or the Ramayana by Tulasidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath, the Gita was my solace. I know the vice that is going on today in all the great Hindu shrines, but I love them in spite of their unspeakable failings. There is an interest which I take in them and which I take in no other. I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never takes me to the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism. I have said I do not disbelieve in idol-worship. An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol-worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism. Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. No Hindu considers an image to be God. I do not consider idol-worship a sin.



It is clear from the foregoing, that Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his own faith or Dharma, and so it lives at peace with all religions.

That being my conception of Hinduism, I have never been able to reconcile myself to untouchability. I have always regarded it as an excrescence. It is true that it has been handed down to us from generations, but so are many evil practices even to this day. I should be ashamed to think, that dedication of girls to virtual prostitution was a part of Hinduism. Yet it is practised by Hindus in many parts of India. I consider it positive irreligion to sacrifice goats to Kali and do not consider it a part of Hinduism. Hinduism is a growth of ages. The very name, Hinduism, was given to the religion of the people of Hindusthan by foreigners. There was no doubt, at one time sacrifice of animals offered in the name of religion. But it is not religion, much less is it Hindu religion. And so also it seems to me, that when cow protection became an article of faith with our ancestors, those persisted in eating beef were excommunicated. The civil strife must have been fierce. Social boycott was applied not only to recalcitrants, but their sins were visited upon their children also. The practice which had probably its origin in good intentions hardened into usage, and even verses crept into our sacred books giving the practice a permanence wholly undeserved and still less justified. Whether my theory is correct or not, untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love. A religion that establishes the worship of the cow cannot possibly countenance or warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings. And I should be content to be torn to pieces rather than disown the suppressed classes. Hindus will certainly never deserve freedom, nor get it if they allow their noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of untouchability. And as I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint

has become for me an intolerable burden. Let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association on an equal footing.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21, p. 317

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## IS THERE SATAN IN HINDUISM?

A correspondent writes:

“A few months back under a heading not quite justified by its contents you published a letter of mine concerning certain religious systems and the belief in God. (See *Young India* 1925, p. 155). Now I am tempted to put you a question concerning His adversary (according to Semitic beliefs), whose name you are so often using in your writings and speeches;—not of course without effect, as witness the article ‘Snares of Satan’ in your issue of 6-8-'25. If it was only rhetorical effect that was intended thereby, because you were writing or speaking in the language of a people who have been taught to believe in Satan’s existence through the Semitic creed of Christianity, then I would have nothing to say. But the article cited, among other things, does seem to point to a belief on your part in Satan’s existence,—a belief, in my humble opinion, quite un-Hindu. Asked by Arjuna what was the cause of man’s continual fall, Shri Krishna said: ‘*Kama esha krodha esha*’, etc. (It is lust, it is anger). According to Hindu belief, it would seem, the Tempter is no person outside of us,—nor indeed is it *one*; for there are ‘the six enemies’ of man enumerated in the Shastras: *Kama* or lust, *krodha* or anger, *lobha* or greed, *moha* or infatuation, *mada* or pride, and *matsara*, i.e. envy or jealousy. So it is clear, Hinduism has no place for Satan, the Fallen Angel, the Tempter, or as he has been called by a French writer (Anatole France), ‘God’s man-of-affairs’! How is it then that you who are a Hindu speak and write as if you believed in the real existence of the old one? ”

This correspondent is well known to the readers of *Young India*. He is too wide-awake not to know the sense in which I could use the word Satan. But I have observed in him a disposition to draw me out on many matters about which there is a likelihood of the slightest mis-



understanding or about which a greater elucidation may be considered necessary. In my opinion the beauty of Hinduism lies in its all-embracing inclusiveness. What the divine author of the Mahabharata said of his great creation is equally true of Hinduism. What of substance is contained in any other religion is always to be found in Hinduism. And what is not contained in it is insubstantial or unnecessary. I do believe that there is room for Satan in Hinduism. The Biblical conception is neither new nor original. Satan is not a personality even in the Bible. Or he is as much a personality in the Bible as Ravana or the whole brood of the *asuras* is in Hinduism. I no more believe in a historical Ravana with ten heads and twenty arms than in a historical Satan. And even as Satan and his companions are fallen angels, so are Ravana and his companions fallen angels, or call them gods, if you will. If it be a crime to clothe evil passions and ennobling thoughts in personalities, it is a crime for which perhaps Hinduism is the most responsible. For are not the six passions referred to by my correspondent, and nameless others, embodied in Hinduism? Who or what is Dhritarashtra and his hundred sons? To the end of time imagination, that is, poetry, will play a useful and necessary part in the human evolution. We shall continue to talk of passions as if they were persons. Do they not torment us as much as evil persons? Therefore, as in innumerable other things in the matter under notice the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.

*Young India*, 17-9-'25, p. 324

## II VARNASHRAMADHARMA

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### THE LAW OF VARNA AND ASHRAMA

(The Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, is publishing in book-form\* all Gandhiji's writings and speeches on Varnashramadharma, and at the request of the Manager, he has written a comprehensive introduction to the booklet. It is translated here for the benefit both of the readers of the *Harijan* and of those who were regular readers of *Young India*. It is likely that many of these latter have on their shelves files of *Young India*. Let them look up their files and study the subject in the light of this introduction, which is the latest expression of Gandhiji's views on Varnashramadharma. —M. D.)

#### I

I should have loved to go through all my speeches and writings on Varnashrama during the past fifteen years before writing this introduction, but it was physically impossible. Perhaps it is well that I cannot do so. I have never made a fetish of consistency. I am a votary of truth and I must say what I feel and think at a given moment on the question without regard to what I may have said before on it. It is for the reader to find out how far my present views coincide with those formerly expressed. Wherever he finds that what I have said or written before runs contrary to what I am writing now, he should without hesitation reject the former. As my vision gets clearer, my views must grow clearer with daily practice. Where I have deliberately altered an opinion, the change should be obvious, only, a careful eye would notice a gradual and imperceptible evolution.

Varnashramadharma is a compound word known to all our vernaculars, and, though the word Dharma (law) is related to both the components Varna and Ashrama, the words are rarely used in separation. Hinduism is but another and imperfect name for Varnashramadharma. The word 'Hindu' was apparently coined by foreigners and has more

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\* It has been published in Gujarati in 1934 under the title *Varnavyavastha*.



a geographical than any other content. The Dharma (religion or law) that Hindus have professed to observe is Varnashramadharma. To say that the Dharma of the Hindus is Aryan does not carry us very far. It simply means that the Hindus or those who lived in the East of the Indus called themselves Aryas and others non-Aryas. To give our Dharma this kind of ethnic label is, in my opinion, misleading. It should have a name that declares its predominant characteristic, and everyone will admit that Hinduism is nothing without the law of Varna and Ashrama. It would be impossible to find any Smriti work of which a large part was not devoted to Varnashramadharma. This law of Varna and Ashrama is to be traced to our most ancient scriptures—the Vedas, and so no one who calls himself a Hindu may ignore it. It is his duty to study it in all its bearings, and to reject it if it is an excrescence, and to foster it and restore it to its pristine purity, if it represents a universal law.

So far as the law of Ashrama is concerned, it is extinct, alike in profession and observance. Hinduism lays down four Ashramas or stages—the life of a Brahmachari (continent student), the life of a Grihastha (householder), the life of a Vanprastha (who has retired) and the life of a Sannyasi (renunciator)—through which every Hindu has to pass to fulfil his purpose in life. But the first and the third are practically non-existent today, the fourth may be said to be observed in name to a small extent. The second is professed to be observed by all today, but it is observed in name, not in spirit, Grihasthas or householders of a kind we all are, inasmuch as we eat and drink and propagate our kind, like all created beings. But in doing so, we fulfil the law of the flesh and not of the spirit. Only those married couples who fulfil the law of the spirit can be said to observe the law of Grihastha Ashrama. Those who live the mere animal life do not observe the law. The life of householders of today is one of indulgence. And as the four stages represent a ladder of growth and are interdependent, one cannot leap to the stage of a Vanaprastha or a Sannyasi, unless he or she fulfilled the law of the first two Ashramas—Brahmacharya and Grihastha. The law of the Ashrama,

therefore, is a dead letter today. It can be revived only if the law of Varna, with which it is intimately interlinked, is revived.

That brings us to a consideration of the law of Varna. Varna can certainly be said to exist, though in a distorted form. There are four Varnas, but the distortion that passes as Varna today is divided into countless castes. All the four Varnas are divided into numerous castes and sub-castes, but whilst those who belong to the first three are not ashamed to declare that they belong to them, those who belong to the fourth, viz., Shoodra, prefer to declare the sub-caste as their label rather than their Varna which they regard as a badge of humiliation.

But labels never reveal a man's character, nor does the fact that a man clings to a label shows that he deserves it. A black man will not be red, no matter how repeatedly he calls himself red. In the same way, one does not become a Brahmana by calling himself a Brahmana. Not until a man reveals in his life the attributes of a Brahmana can he deserve that name. Considered in this light, Varna may be said to be extinct. If we may, indeed, claim a label, we can call ourselves Shoodras, though really we are not entitled to that name either, inasmuch as we do not observe the law of that Varna. The law is the law of one's being, which one has to fulfil. The fulfilment should be spontaneous and no matter of honour or shame. How many are there who are fulfilling the law as law, i.e. spontaneously? We fulfil it because we cannot help it, we are all serfs, whether we will it or no. Let no one contend that Varna exists today, because all the functions of the different Varnas are being performed by some one or other and somehow or other. Varna is intimately, if not indissolubly, connected with birth, and the observance of the law of Varna means the following on the part of us all the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers in a spirit of duty. Those who thus fulfil the law of their Varna can be counted on one's fingers' ends. This performance of one's hereditary function is done as a matter of duty, though it naturally carries with it the earning of one's livelihood. Thus, the function of a Brahmana is to study and to teach the science



of Brahman (or spiritual truth). He performs the function, as he cannot do otherwise, as it is the law of his being. That secures him his livelihood, but he will take it as a gift from God. A Kshatriya will perform the function of protecting the people in the same spirit, accepting for his livelihood whatever the people can afford to give him. A Vaishya will pursue wealth-producing occupations for the welfare of the community, keeping for himself enough for his own maintenance and rendering the balance to the community in one shape or other. A Shoodra will perform physical labour in the same spirit of service.

Varna is determined by birth, but can be retained only by observing its obligations. One born of Brahmana parents will be called a Brahmana, but if his life fails to reveal the attributes of a Brahmana when he comes of age, he cannot be called a Brahmana.\* He will have fallen from Brahmanahood. On the other hand, one who is born not a Brahmana but reveals in his conduct the attributes of a Brahmana will be regarded as a Brahmana, though he will himself disclaim the label.

Varna thus conceived is no man-made institution but the law of life universally governing the human family. Fulfilment of the law would make life livable, would spread peace and content, end all clashes and conflicts, put an end to starvation and pauperization, solve the problem of population and even end disease and suffering.

But if Varna reveals the law of one's being and thus the duty one has to perform, it confers no right, and the idea of superiority or inferiority is wholly repugnant to it. All Varnas are equal, for the community depends no less on one than on another. Today Varna means gradations of high and low. It is a hideous travesty of the original. The law of Varna was discovered by our ancestors by stern

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\*Lord Buddha has expressed a similar thought in the following verse in Dhammapada:

न जटा हि न गोत्तेन न जच्चा होति ब्राह्मणो ।

यम्हि सच्चं च धम्मो च सो सुची सो च ब्राह्मणो ॥ ३९३ ॥

“Neither matted hair, nor noble birth, nor caste make a Brahmana. The man of Truth and Law is the Brahmana.” 393.

austerities. They sought to live up to the law to the best of their capacity. We have distorted it today and have made ourselves the laughing-stock of the world. No wonder that we have today amongst the Hindus a section which is bending its energies to a destruction of the institution which, in their opinion, spells the ruin of the Hindus. And certainly one need have no mercy for the hideous distortion which means nothing but destruction of Hinduism.

## II

I do not for a moment suggest that there should be no restrictions about food and drink or about marital relations. I do not myself regard it a duty to eat whatever is offered and in whatever company I should chance to be, and I regard it as nothing short of indulgence to marry according to one's fancy. Strict restraint is the law of life and must, therefore, govern these relations no less than others. I hold that there are rules about diet. Man is not an omnivorous animal, nor may he pick up his mate wherever he likes. But restrictions on marital or social relations have nothing to do with Varnadharma, which is a different thing altogether. I can conceive blameless marital relations between different Varnas, and people of different Varnas seated together to eat food permissible to all. There is evidence enough to show that in ancient times there were no watertight compartments between Varnas, so far as marital and social relations went, and I have no doubt that, in making Varna a mere matter of restrictions about food and drink and marriage, we have done Hinduism grave harm.

Though the law of Varna is a special discovery of some Hindu seer, it has universal application. Every religion has some distinguishing characteristic, but if it expresses a principle or law, it ought to have universal application. That is how I look at the law of Varna. The world may ignore it today but it will have to accept it in the time to come.

I would define the law briefly thus: The law of Varna means that everyone shall follow as a matter of Dharma—duty—the hereditary calling of his forefathers, insofar as



it is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics. He will earn his livelihood by following that calling. He may not hoard riches, but devote the balance to the good of the people.

The four Varnas have been compared in the Vedas to the four members of the body, and no simile could be happier. If they are members of one body, how can one be superior or inferior to another? If the members of the body had the power of expression and each of them were to say that it was higher and better than the rest, the body would go to pieces. Even so, our body politic, the body of humanity, would go to pieces, if it were to perpetuate the canker of superiority or inferiority. It is this canker that is at the root of the various ills of our time, especially class wars and civil strife. It should not be difficult for even the meanest understanding to see that these wars and strife could not be ended except by the observance of the law of Varna. For it ordains that everyone shall fulfil the law of one's being by doing in a spirit of duty and service that to which one is born. Earning of livelihood is the necessary result. But the law has to be fulfilled for its own sake. Its due observance by a large part of mankind will end the conflicting inequalities and give place to an equality in diversity. All callings would be equally reputable—whether that of the minister or of the lawyer, of the doctor or the leather-worker, of the carpenter or the scavenger, of the soldier, of the trader, of the farmer, of the spiritual teacher. In this ideal state of things, there would be no room for the monstrous anomaly of the three Varnas lording it over the Shoodra, or of the Kshatriya and the Vaishya enjoying themselves in their palaces and the Brahmana contenting himself with a cottage and the Shoodra toiling for the rest and living in a hovel. This chaotic state of things indicates that the law of Varna has become a dead letter.

When, if ever, the ideal state of things, as indicated above, had been reached in India, I do not know. But I do hold that it is the only ideal state that is easy enough to approach and that it is not only for the Hindu but for the whole of humanity.

Under such a dispensation, all property will be held by its respective holders in trust for the community. No one will claim it as his own. The king will hold his palace in trust for his people and will collect the taxes only to be used for the benefit of the people. He has the right to have no more than is enough to keep him, the rest belongs to, and shall be spent only for, the people. Indeed, he will, by virtue of his resourcefulness as a ruler, add to what he collects from the people and return it to them manifold. The Vaishya likewise is such a trustee. The Shoodra is made so. Indeed, if one may have preference, the Shoodra, who performs body-labour in a spirit of service and duty, who has nothing to call his own and who has no desire for ownership, is worthy of the world's homage; he is the lord of all, because he is the greatest servant. The dutiful Shoodra will, of course, repudiate any such claim, but the gods will shower their choicest blessings on him. One may not say this of the proletariat of the present day. They certainly own nothing, but I expect they covet ownership. The calling of labour and service is no pleasant duty to them. It is a painful task, for it does not satisfy even the cravings of the flesh. My praise is for the ideal Labourer. It is the estate I have longed to attain.

But this duty of labour cannot be imposed on anybody. In fact, the panegyric may be uttered only by those of the three Varnas who fulfil the law themselves, viz., the law of regarding and behaving themselves as the servants of the community and holding all the property in trust for it. The three Varnas exist today only in name, they are supposed to invest one with a higher status than that of the Shoodra and have ceased to imply any duty to be performed. There is nothing, therefore, to be surprised at, nor to be sorry for, when in such a state of things the Shoodras should be jealous of the others' possessions and their estate and seek to share them. When the law of Varna was discovered, there could be no compulsion from without. The world can only be sustained by a willing and dutiful observance of it.

In an age where competition is held to be the law of life, and possession in the largest measure of the world's



goods the *summum bonum*, and when everyone counts oneself free to follow any calling one likes, this attempt to hold up Varna as the law of life may well be regarded as an idle dream, and an attempt to revive it as childish folly. Be that as it may, it is my firm conviction that it is true socialism. In the language of the Gita, it is equality of the spirit, without which no other equality is possible. The performance of it, no matter how slight, bodes well both for him who performs it and for the rest of mankind.

I may add that, though the Varnas are to be four, the number is not, in my opinion, unalterable. In the future reconstruction, the number may be more or even less than four. What is essential is that one must seek one's livelihood, and no more, from following the vocation to which one is born.

*Harijan*, 28-9-'34, p. 260

## 71

### THE WAY TO DEMONSTRATE THE TRUTH OF BRAHMANISM

(Originally appeared under the title "The Much-maligned Brahmin")

A Bengali Professor writes a long letter from which I take the following extracts:

"You will be distressed to learn that the untouchability movement in certain parts of the country has degenerated into a vile and violent propaganda against Brahmanism and all that it stands for. Misleading half-truths and deliberate untruths are being assiduously circulated in order to lower the Brahmanas as a class in the estimation of the general public. Is the practice of untouchability confined exclusively to the Brahmanas? Are not the other caste-Hindus equally guilty? Even admitting that the Shastras were made by the Brahmanas, where is the proof that the Shastras enjoin a rabid type of untouchability as is practised today in certain parts of India?

"Is it not a fact that the Brahmanas have made very substantial contribution towards the success of the present anti-untouchability movement? Is it not, again, true that the majority

of those of our worthy M.L.A.s who have adopted an obstructionist attitude towards the Temple Entry Bills happen to be other than Brahmanas? Why, then, this tirade against the Brahmanas, who perhaps realize more than anybody else the gravity of the situation created by the scourge of untouchability?"

Except for the writings in the papers and periodicals representing the anti-Brahmana movement which has been going on in the country for some years and which was inaugurated long before the campaign against untouchability was, I have not seen any attack, violent or otherwise, upon Brahmanism. Certainly the servants of Untouchables' Society have nothing to do with any such attack, and the writer is quite right in saying that I would be distressed if I learnt that the anti-untouchability movement had degenerated into a vile and violent propaganda against Brahmanism. I have, therefore, asked the correspondent to furnish me with the evidence that may be in his possession to prove the serious statement he has made. The latter enables me, however, to reiterate my own opinion of Brahmanism and Brahmanas.

I believe Brahmanism to be unadulterated wisdom leading one to the realization of Brahma, that is God. If I did not hold that view, I should no longer call myself a Hindu. Brahmanas, however, like all the other members of the human family, are not all true representatives of Brahmanism. But I have to believe that, of all the classes in the world, the Brahmana will show the largest percentage of those who have given up their all in search of knowledge, that is Truth. I know of no system other than Hinduism under which a class has been set apart from generation to generation for the exclusive pursuit of divine knowledge and consigned to voluntary poverty. That Brahmanas could not keep up the high standards they had imposed upon themselves is no special fault of theirs. Their imperfection merely proves that they were as fallible as the rest of the mankind, and so corruption crept into the so-called sacred books, and we have the spectacle of the most selfless rules governing Brahmanas side by side with the selfish rules also made by them in order to help their breed. But it was the Brahmanas who rose against the corruptions and



selfish interpolations into the sacred texts. It was they who time and again strove to purge themselves and society of evil. I confess that I have the highest reverence for Brahmanism and a sneaking regard for Brahmanas and that, in spite of what is to me the sorrowful spectacle of Brahmanas so-called, making a frantic effort against the reform movement and lending their undoubted ability to the opposition, I am consoled, and let every unbiassed Hindu be consoled, by the fact that the reform movement, too, is being led by those who are born Brahmanas but who today take no pride in their birth. If a census was taken of all the workers against untouchability, I think that it will be found that the majority of workers who are devoted to the cause without any remuneration or with only just enough to keep body and soul together are Brahmanas. But I admit that Brahmanas as a class have suffered degradation. If they had not, if they had lived up to their profession, Hinduism would not be in the degraded state in which it is. It would be a contradiction in terms to suggest that Hinduism is what it is, in spite of the correct life of the Brahmanas. That could not be, because the Brahmanas themselves have taught us to believe that they are the true custodians of the divine wisdom and that, where there is divine wisdom, there is no fear, there is no grinding pauperism, there is no high and low state, there is no greed, jealousy, war, plunder and the like. Because Brahmanism went down, it drew down with it all the other classes of Hindus, and I have not a shadow of doubt in my mind that if Brahmanism does not revive, Hinduism must perish, and for me the infallible test of the revival of Brahmanism, that is Hinduism, is the root and branch removal of untouchability. The more I study the Hindu scriptures and the more I discuss them with all kinds of Brahmanas, the more I feel convinced that untouchability is the greatest blot upon Hinduism. This conviction is amply supported by many learned Brahmanas who have no axes to grind, who are devoted to the pursuit of truth and who receive nothing, not even thanks for their opinion. But today Brahmanas and Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shoodras are mere labels. There is utter confusion of Varna as I

understand it and as I have explained it in these columns, and I wish that all the Hindus will voluntarily call themselves Shudras. That is the only way to demonstrate the truth of Brahmanism and to revive Varnadharma in its true state. Because all Hindus may be classed as Shudras, wisdom and power and wealth will not disappear, but they will be all used for the service of not a sectional religion but the service of Truth and Humanity. Anyway, in battling against untouchability and in dedicating myself to that battle, I have no less an ambition than to see a complete regeneration of humanity. It may be a mere dream, as unreal as the silver in the sea-shell. It is not so to me while the dream lasts, and in the words of Romain Rolland, "Victory lies not in realization of the goal, but in a relentless pursuit after it."

*Harijan*, 25-3-'33, p. 3

## 72

### VARNASHRAMA AND ITS DISTORTION

The reader will find in another column Sjt. Nadkarni's interesting letter\* on the Brahmana non-Brahmana question. I gladly respond to his invitation to explain my views on Varnashrama more fully than I have done in my speeches during the recent Tamil Nad tour, which have been more or less fully reproduced in these columns.

Let me clear the issue by dismissing from consideration the celebrated story of a Shudra said to have had his head cut off by Rama by reason of his having dared to become a Sannyasi. I do not read Shastras literally, certainly not as history. The story of the decapitation of Shambuka is not in keeping with the general character of Rama. And whatever may be said in the various Ramayanas, I hold my Rama to be incapable of having decapitated a Shudra or for that matter any one else. The story of Shambuka, if it proves anything, proves that in the days when the story arose it was held to be a capital crime for Shudras to perform certain rites. We are in the dark as to the meaning

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\*Omitted in this compilation.



of the word Shudra here. I have heard even an allegorical meaning given to the whole version. But that would not alter the fact of certain unreasonable prohibitions operating against the Shudras at some stage in the evolution of Hinduism. Only I do not need to join Sjt. Nadkarni in doing penance for the alleged decapitation of Shambuka, for I do not believe in a historical person by that name having been decapitated by a historical person called Rama. For the general persecution of the so-called lower orders of Hinduism, especially the so-called untouchables, I am as a Hindu doing penance every moment of my life. In my opinion illustrations like that of Shambuka have no place in a religious consideration of the question or Varnashrama. I propose therefore merely to say what I believe to be Varnashrama, and I should hesitate to reject the institution if it was proved to me that the interpretation put upon it by me has no warrant in Hinduism. Varna and Ashrama are, as Sjt. Nadkarni says, two different words. The institution of four Ashramas enables one the better to fulfil the purpose of life for which the law of Varna is a necessity. The law of Varna prescribes that a person should, for his living, follow the lawful occupation of his forefathers. I hold this to be a universal law governing the human family. Its breach entails as it has entailed serious consequence for us. But the vast majority of men unwillingly follow the hereditary occupation of their fathers. Hinduism rendered a great service to mankind by the discovery of and conscious obedience to this law. If man's as distinguished from lower animal's function is to know God, it follows that he must not devote the chief part of his life to making experiments in finding out what occupation will best suit him for earning his livelihood. On the contrary, he will recognize that it is best for him to follow his father's occupation, and devote his spare time and talent to qualifying himself for the task to which mankind is called.

Here then the difficulty suggested by my correspondent does not arise. For no one is precluded from rendering multitudinous acts of voluntary service and qualifying oneself for it. Thus Sjt. Nadkarni, born of Brahmana parents, and I, born of Vaishya parents, may consistently

with the law of Varna certainly serve as honorary national volunteers or as honorary nurses or honorary scavengers in times of need, though in obedience to that law he as a Brahmana would depend for his bread on the charity of his neighbours and I as a Vaishya would be earning my bread by selling drugs or groceries. Every one is free to render any useful service so long as he does not claim reward for it.

In this conception of the law of Varna no one is superior to any other. All occupations are equal and honourable in so far as they are not in conflict with morals private or public. A scavenger has the same status as a Brahmana. Was it not Max Muller who said that it was in Hinduism more than in any other religion that life was no more and no less than Duty?

There is no doubt that at some stages of its evolution Hinduism suffered corruption, and the canker of superiority and inferiority entered and vitiated it. But this notion of inequality seems to me to be wholly against the spirit of sacrifice which dominates every thing in Hinduism. There is no room for arrogation of superiority by one class over another in a scheme of life based on Ahimsa whose active form is undefiled love for all life.

Let it not be said against this law of Varna that it makes life dull and robs it of all ambition. In my opinion the law of Varna alone makes life livable by all and restores to ambition the only object worthy of it, namely self-realization. Today we seem to think of and strive for material pursuits which are in their very nature transitory, and we do this almost to the exclusion of one thing needful.

If I am told that the interpretation put by me upon Varna is not supported by anything to be found in the Smritis which are codified Hindu conduct, my answer is that the codes of conduct based upon fundamental invariable maxims of life vary from time to time as we gain fresh experience and make fresh observations. It is possible to show many rules of the Smritis which we no longer recognize as binding or even worthy of observance. Invariable maxims are few and common to all religions. The latter vary in their application. And no religion has exhausted the varieties



of all possible applications. They must expand with the expansion of ideas and knowledge of new facts. Indeed I believe that the contents of words grow with the growth of human experience. The connotation of the words sacrifice, truth, non-violence, Varnashrama etc., is infinitely richer today than it was during the known historic past. Applying this principle to the word Varna, we need not be bound, it would be foolish and wrong to be bound, by the current interpretation, assuming that it is inconsistent with the requirements of the age or with our notions of morals. To do otherwise will be suicide.

Varna considered in the manner above indicated has nothing in common with caste as we know it today, nor is prohibition as to inter-dining and inter-marriage an essential part of the recognition of the law of Varna. That these prohibitions were introduced for the conservation of Varnas is possible. Restrictions against promiscuous marriage are necessary in any scheme of life based on self-restraint. Restraints on promiscuous dining arise either from sanitary consideration or differences in habits. But disregard of these restrictions formerly carried, or what is more, should now carry no social or legal punishment or forfeiture of one's Varna.

Varnas were originally four. It was an intelligent and intelligible division. But the number is no part of the law of Varna. A tailor for instance may not become a blacksmith although both may be and should be classed as Vaishyas.

The most forcible objection I heard raised in Tamil Nad was, that however good and innocuous Varnas might appear under my interpretation, they must either be worked under a different name or destroyed altogether by reason of the evil odour that surrounded them. The objectors feared that my interpretation would be ignored and yet my authority would be freely quoted for supporting under cover of Varna the hideous inequalities and tyrannies practised at the present day in Hinduism. They further observed that in the popular estimation caste and Varna were mere synonymous terms and that the restraint of Varna was nowhere practised, but the tyranny of caste

was rampant everywhere. All these objections have no doubt much force in them. But they are objections such as can be advanced against many corrupted institutions that once were good. A reformer's business is to examine the institution itself and to set about reforming it, if its abuses can be separated from it. Varna is however not a mere institution made by man but it is a law discovered by him. It cannot, therefore, be set aside; its hidden meaning and potentialities should be explored and utilized for the good of society. We have seen that the evil is not in the law or the institution itself, but it lies in the doctrine of superiority and inferiority which are superadded to it.

The question too arises how the law is to be worked in these days when all the four Varnas or sub-Varnas break asunder all the restrictions, seeking by all means lawful and otherwise to advance their material welfare, and when some arrogate superiority over others who in their turn are rightly challenging the claim. The law will work itself out even if we ignore it. But that will be the way of punishment. If we will escape destruction, we will submit to it. And seeing that we are just now engaged in applying to ourselves the sub-human rule of survival of the fittest meaning the strongest (physically), it would be well to recognize ourselves as one Varna, viz., Shudras even though some may be teaching and some may be soldiering and some others may be engaged in commercial pursuits. I remember in 1915 the Chairman at the Social Conference in Nellore suggesting that formerly all were Brahmanas, and that now too all should be recognized as such and that the other Varnas should be abolished. It appeared to be then, as it appears to me now, a weird suggestion. It is the so-called superior that has to descend from his heights, if the reform is to be peaceful. Those who for ages have been trained to consider themselves as the lowest in the social scale cannot suddenly have the equipment of the so-called higher classes. They can, therefore, rise to power only by bloodshed, in other words by destroying society itself. In the scheme of reconstruction I have in view, no mention has been made of the untouchables, for I find no place for untouchability in the law of Varna or otherwise in Hinduism. They



in common with the rest will be absorbed in the Shudras. Out of these the other three Varnas will gradually emerge purified and equal in status though differing in occupations. The Brahmanas will be very few. Fewer still will be the soldier class who will not be the hirelings or the unrestrained rulers of today, but real protectors and trustees of the nation laying down their lives for its service. The fewest will be the Shudras for in a well-ordered society a minimum amount of labour will be taken from fellowmen. The most numerous will be the Vaishyas—a Varna that would include all professions—the agriculturists, the traders, the artisans etc. This scheme may sound utopian. I however prefer to live in this Utopia of my imagination to trying to live up to the unbridled licence of a society that I see tottering to its disruption. It is surely given to individuals to live their own utopias even though they may not be able to see them accepted by society. Every reform has made its beginning with the individual, and that which had inherent vitality and the backing of a stout soul was accepted by the society in whose midst the reformer lived.

*Young India*, 17-11-'27, p. 384

### 73

## WOMEN AND VARNA

(Translated from *Harijanbandhu*)

An esteemed friend writes:

“From your recent writing on Varna in *Harijan* it seems that the principle of Varna adumbrated by you is intended to apply only to men. What, then, about women? What would determine a woman's Varna? Perhaps you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her Varna from her father; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for woman at any stage of her life, that before marriage she must remain under the tutelage of her parents, after marriage under that of her husband, and in the event of her widowhood, under that of her children?

“Be that as it may, the fact remains that ours is an era of woman suffrage and that she has definitely entered the lists with men in the pursuit of independent avocations. It is thus the commonest thing nowadays to find a woman serving as a school mistress, while her husband is doing business as a money-lender. To what Varna would the woman under these circumstances belong? Under the Varnashrama dispensation, a man would normally take up the avocation and, therefore, also the Varna of his parents, while a woman would adopt that of her parents; and they may well be expected to stick to their respective avocations after their marriage. To what Varna between these would their children belong? Or would you leave the question to be decided by the children themselves, by their free, independent choice? In the latter case, what becomes of the hereditary basis of Varna which the Varnashramadharma, as expounded by you, postulates?”

In my opinion, the question raised is irrelevant in the circumstances prevailing today. As I have pointed out in the writing referred to, owing to the confusion of the Varnas, today there are in reality no Varnas, the Varna principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy; the four Varnas today exist in name only. If we must talk in terms of Varna, there is only one Varna today for all, whether men or women; we are all Shoodras.

In the resuscitated Varnadharma, as I conceive it, a girl before her marriage will belong to the Varna of her father, just like her brother. Inter-marriage between different Varnas will be rare. A girl will, therefore, retain her Varna unimpaired even after her marriage. But should the husband belong to a different Varna, then, on marriage, she would naturally adopt his Varna and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need such a change of Varna be understood to imply a slur against anybody or touch anybody's susceptibilities, since the institution of Varna in the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all the four Varnas.

I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband. The care of the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. In a well-ordered society



the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours.

Nor do I see in this any invasion of woman's rights or suppression of her freedom. The saying attributed to Manu that "For woman there can be no freedom" is to me not sacrosanct. It only shows that probably, at the time when it was promulgated, women were kept in a state of subjection. The epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are *ardhangana*, "the better half", and *sahadharmini*, "the helpmate". The husband addressing the wife as *devi* or "goddess" does not show any disparagement. But, unfortunately, a time came when the woman was divested of many of her rights and privileges and was reduced to a state of inferiority. But there could be no question of depreciation of her Varna. For, Varna does not connote a set of rights or privileges; it prescribes duties or obligations only. And no one can divest us of our duty, unless we ourselves choose to shirk it. The woman who knows and fulfils her duty realizes her dignified status. She is the queen, not the slave, of the household over which she presides.

I need hardly say after this that, if the position set forth by me with regard to the role of the woman in society is accepted, the question of the Varna of the children will cease to present any problem, as there will be no more any discrepancy as between the Varnas of the husband and wife.

*Harijan*, 12-10-'34, p. 276

## VARNASHRAMA AND BREAD LABOUR

(Originally appeared under the title "Varnashrama or Varnasankara?")

In an article in reply to a fair friend Gandhiji observed:

In the case in point if only the fair friend had borne in mind that I had presented the message of the wheel not to the Hindus alone but to all Indians without exception, to men and women, to Musalmans, Parsis, Christians, Jews, Sikhs and all others who claimed to be Indians, she would have written differently. She would then have inferred that I had placed before the people of India something which not only did not come in conflict with the several religions but which, in so far as it was taken up, added lustre to one's own religion and in Hinduism to one's own Varna or caste. Mine therefore I claim to be a method not of confusion but cleansing. I ask no one to forsake his own hereditary Dharma or occupation but I ask every one to add spinning to his natural occupation. The Rajputs of Kathiawad knew this. They asked me whether I wanted them to give up their swords. I told them I wanted them to do no such thing. On the contrary, I added, I wanted each one of them to possess a trusty sword so long as they believed in it. But I certainly told them that my ideal Rajput was he who defended without the sword and who died at his post without killing. A sword may be snatched from one, not so the bravery to die without striking. But this is by the way. For my purpose it is enough to show that the Rajputs were not to give up their calling of protecting the weak. Nor do I want the Brahmanas to give up their vocation as teachers. I have suggested to them that they become better teachers for sacrificial spinning. Vinoba and Balkoba are better Brahmanas for having become spinners and weavers and scavengers. Their knowledge is more digested. A Brahmana is one who knows God. Both these fellow-workers are nearer God today by reason of their having felt for and identified themselves through spinning with the starving millions of India. Divine knowledge is not borrowed from books. It has to be realized



in oneself. Books are at best an aid, often even a hindrance. A learned Brahmana had to learn divine wisdom from a God-fearing butcher.

What is this Varnashrama? It is not a system of watertight compartments. It is a recognition to me of a scientific fact whether we know it or not. A Brahmana is not only a teacher. He is only predominantly that. But a Brahmana who refuses to labour will be voted down as an idiot. The Rishis of old who lived in the forests, cut and fetched wood, tended cattle and even fought. But their pursuit in life was pre-eminently search after Truth. Similarly a Rajput without learning was good for nothing, no matter how well he wielded the sword. And a Vaishya without divine knowledge sufficient for his own growth will be a veritable monster eating into the vitals of society as many modern Vaishyas whether of the East or the West have become. They are, according to the Gita 'incarnations of sin who live only for themselves'. The spinning wheel is designed to wake up every one to a sense of his duty. It enables every one better to fulfil his Dharma or duty. When a vessel is running on smooth waters, work on board is exquisitely divided. But when it is caught in the grip of a violent storm and is about to sink, every one has to give a helping hand to the necessary work of life-saving.

Let us bear in mind that with the rest of the world India finds herself in the deadly coil of the mercantile cobra. It is a nation of shop-keeping soldiers that claims to rule her. It will tax all the resources of all her best Brahmanas to unwind India from that coil. Her learned men and her soldiers will therefore have to bring their learning and their powers to bear upon the mercantile requirements of India. They must, therefore, in order to be able faithfully to carry out their Dharma, learn and practise spinning.

Nor have I the least hesitation in recommending hand-weaving as a bread-winning occupation to all who are in need of an honest occupation. To the Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas and others, who at the present moment are not following their hereditary occupation but are engaged in the mad rush for riches, I present the honest and (for them) selfless toil of the weaver and invite them with a

view to returning to their respective Dharmas to be satisfied with what little the hand-loom yields to them. Just as eating, drinking, sleeping etc. are common to all castes and all religions, so must spinning be common to all without exception whilst the confusion, selfish greed and resulting pauperism persist. Mine therefore is not a method of making Varnasankara—confusion worse confounded—but it is one of making Varnashrama—cleansing more secure.

*Young India*, 17-7-'24, p. 238

## 75

## NO REAL VARNA TODAY

## I

(From "Caste and Communal Question")

As for caste I have frequently said that I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence it is a mental state. We need to think of and to assert equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equality in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over any other is a sin against God and man. Thus caste, in so far as it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil.

I do however believe in Varna which is based on hereditary occupations. Varnas are four to mark four universal occupations—imparting knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agriculture and commerce and performing service through physical labour. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduism having recognized them as the law of our being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. Gravitation affects us all whether one knows its existence or not. But scientists who knew the law have made it yield results that have startled the world. Even so has Hinduism startled the world by its discovery and application of the law of Varna.



When Hindus were seized with inertia, abuse of Varna resulted in innumerable castes with unnecessary and harmful restrictions as to inter-marriage and inter-dining. The law of Varna has nothing to do with these restrictions. People of different Varnas may inter-marry and inter-dine. These restrictions may be necessary in the interest of chastity and hygiene. But a Brahmana who marries a Shudra girl or vice versa commits no offence against the law of Varna.

Marriage outside one's religion stands on a different footing. Even here, so long as each is free to observe his or her religion, I can see no moral objection to such unions....

The untouchables are a class apart—a standing reproach to Hinduism. The castes are a handicap, they are no sin. Untouchability is a sin, a grievous crime, and will eat up Hinduism, if the latter does not kill the snake in time. 'Untouchables' should no longer be the outcaste of Hinduism. They should be regarded as honoured members of Hindu society, and should belong to the Varna for which their occupation fits them.

According to my definition of Varna there is no Varna in operation in Hinduism. The so-called Brahmanas have ceased to impart knowledge. They take to various other occupations. This is more or less true of the other Varnas. In reality, being under foreign domination we are all slaves, and hence less than Shudras—untouchables of the West.

*Young India*, 4-6-'31, p. 129

## II

(From "A Student's Questions")

*Q.*: Do you believe in caste? If so, what do you consider to be its value?

*A.*: I do not believe in caste as it is at present constituted, but I do believe in the four fundamental divisions regulated according to the four principal occupations. The existing innumerable divisions with the attendant artificial restrictions and elaborate ceremonial are harmful

to the growth of a religious spirit, as also to the social well-being of the Hindus and therefore also their neighbours.

*Young India*, 25-2-'26, p. 77

### III.

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

A Harijan worker once asked Gandhiji, "When untouchability is no more, what Varna will you assign to Harijans?"

*Gandhiji replied*: "Who am I to assign a Varna to you? But if I had the power, I should declare that we are all Hindus, all of the same Varna. As I have made it clear over and over again there is no real Varna today. When we have come to our own, when we have cleansed ourselves we may have the four Varnas according to the way in which we can express the best in us. But Varna then will invest no one with a superior status or right, it will invest one with higher responsibility and duties. Those who will impart knowledge in a spirit of service will be called Brahmanas. They will assume no superior airs but will be true servants of society. When inequality of status or rights is ended, every one of us will be equal. I do not know, however, when we shall be able to revive true Varnadharma. Its real revival would mean true democracy."

*Harijan*, 4-4-'36, p. 57

### IV

(From replies to questions of Rev. Stanley Jones)

There is one thing more to be remembered about the caste system. For me, it is not the same as Varnashramadharma. Whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need, Varnashrama is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not so the caste system. While there are innumerable castes (some dying out and new ones coming into being), the Varnas are, and have always been, four. I am a firm believer in Varnashrama. I have not hesitated before now to consider it as a gift of Hinduism to mankind. Acceptance of that Dharma is, so far as I have been able to see it, a condition of spiritual growth. But I may not here elaborate my view of these four famous divisions in Hinduism. Their consideration



is irrelevant to the present purpose. But I make this admission that today this Varnashramadharma is not being observed in its purity. There is an utter confusion of Varna and, if Hinduism is to become a living force in the world, we have to understand its real purpose and revive it; but we cannot do so, unless the canker of untouchability is destroyed. The idea of inferiority and superiority has to be demolished. The four divisions are not a vertical section, but a horizontal plane on which all stand on a footing of equality doing the services respectively assigned to them. A life of religion is not a life of privileges but of duty. Privileges may come, as they do come to all, from a due fulfilment of duty. In the book of God, the same number of marks are assigned to the Brahmana that has done his task well as to the Bhangi who has done likewise.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'33, p. 2

## 76

### CASTE HAS TO GO

#### I

I gladly publish Sir Govindrao Madgavkar's open letter in this issue.\* My own position has been often stated in these columns. It may be summed up as follows:

1. I believe in Varnashrama of the Vedas which in my opinion is based on absolute equality of status, not withstanding passages to the contrary in the Smritis and elsewhere.

2. Every word of the printed works passing muster as 'Shastras' is not, in my opinion, a revelation.

3. The interpretation of accepted texts has undergone evolution and is capable of indefinite evolution, even as the human intellect and heart are.

4. Nothing in the Shastras which is manifestly contrary to universal truths and morals can stand.

5. Nothing in the Shastras which is capable of being reasoned can stand if it is in conflict with reason.

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\*Omitted from this collection.

6. Varnashrama of the Shastras is today non-existent in practice.

7. The present caste system is the very antithesis of Varnashrama. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better.

8. In Varnashrama there was and should be no prohibition of inter-marriage or inter-dining. Prohibition there is of change of one's hereditary occupation for purposes of gain. The existing practice is therefore doubly wrong in that it has set up cruel restrictions about inter-dining and inter-marriage and tolerates anarchy about choice of occupation.

9. Though there is in Varnashrama no prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the law of Varnashrama was observed there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own Varna.

10. As I have repeatedly said there is no such thing as untouchability by birth in the Shastras. I hold the present practice to be a sin and the greatest blot on Hinduism. I feel more than ever that if untouchability lives, Hinduism dies.

11. The most effective, quickest, and the most unobtrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with themselves and where necessary take the consequences of social boycott. The reform will not come by reviling the orthodox. The change will be gradual and imperceptible. The so-called higher classes will have to descend from their pedestal before they can make any impression upon the so-called lower classes. Day-to-day experience of village work shows how difficult the task is of bridging the gulf that exists between the city-dwellers and the villagers, the higher classes and the lower classes. The two are not synonymous terms. For the class distinction exists both in the cities and the villages.

*Harijan*, 16-11-'35, p. 316



## II

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

*Q.*: You have said caste should go. But then will Hinduism survive? Why do you thus mix up Hinduism with the progressive religions like Christianity or Islam?

*A.*: Gandhiji maintained that caste as it was understood must go if Hinduism was to survive. He did not believe that Christianity and Islam were progressive and Hinduism static, i.e. retrogressive. As a matter of fact he noticed no definite progress in any religion. The world would not be the shambles it had become, if the religions of the world were progressive. There was room for Varna, as a duty. This was true of all religions whether the name used was other than Varna. What was a Muslim Maulvi or a Christian priest but a Brahmana if he taught his flock its true duty, not for money but because he possessed the gift of interpretation? And this was true of other divisions.

*Harijan*, 16-3-'47, p. 61 at p. 62

### III. REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

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#### CASTE, VARNA AND UNTOUCHABILITY

##### I

(The following extracts are taken from an article—"Its Implications")

Untouchability as it is practised in Hinduism today is, in my opinion, a sin against God and man and is, therefore, like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. In my opinion, it has no sanction whatsoever in the Hindu Shastras taken as a whole. Untouchability of a healthy kind is undoubtedly to be found in the Shastras and it is universal in all religions. It is a rule of sanitation. That will exist to the end of time; but untouchability as we are observing today in India is a hideous thing, and wears various forms in various provinces, even in districts. It has degraded both the untouchables and the touchables. It has stunted the growth of nearly 40 million human beings. They are denied even the ordinary amenities of life. The sooner, therefore, it is ended, the better for Hinduism, the better for India and, perhaps better for mankind in general.

Not so the caste system. There are innumerable castes in India. They are a social institution. They are so many trade guilds, as was well said by the late Sir William Wilson Hunter. And at one time they served a very useful purpose, as, perhaps, they are even now doing to a certain extent. This institution has superadded to it restrictions which, in my opinion, are undesirable and are bound to go in course of time. There is nothing sinful about them. They retard the material progress of those who are labouring under them. They are no bar to the spiritual progress. The difference, therefore, between caste system and untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind. An untouchable is outside the pale of respectable society. He is hardly treated as a human being. He is an outcaste hurled



into an abyss by his fellow-beings occupying the same platform. The difference, therefore, is somewhat analogous to the difference between heaven and hell.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'33, p. 2

## II

(Originally appeared under the title "Confusing the Issue")

The Secretary of Jat-Pat Torak Mandal, i.e. Society for the Abolition of Caste, has published in the daily press his letter to me of the 18th ultimo.

He does me the honour of calling me a 'deep thinker' and in the same breath withdraws it by saying "You have failed to see that the caste system is the origin of untouchability and that one cannot do without the other."

I venture to suggest to the Secretary that, if he is really honest in his paying me the compliment, he must suspend his judgment about the caste system and follow out the reasoning of the 'deep thinker' of his imagination; whereas if he has called me a 'deep thinker' in order to increase the height from which I have fallen, I fear that no reasoning of mine will affect him.

However, according to my wont, I propose to give the Secretary credit for honesty and shall, therefore, strive with him. I am one of those who think that the caste system, in so far as it is the English equivalent for Varnashrama, is nothing but a division of labour or duty. Any one who will take the trouble of looking at any religious book must find this out for himself. In that sense, the divisions or classes are four and no more, and these classes are known all the world over. One is the repository of knowledge, the other is that of power, the third is that of wealth and the fourth is that of service. All these four labours are regarded as duties to be discharged by everyone of them for the protection and advancement of Dharma, and everyone who performs his duty to the best of his knowledge and ability gains equal merit with the rest, if the latter, too, do likewise. The merit, therefore, consists not in being one or the other, but in the performance of the duty assigned to it. Here, there is no untouchability. There is no superiority. And

this is the essence of Varnadharma. It may be non-existent today and it is so. That, however, in no way diminishes the force of my argument that there is no superiority and inferiority in the original conception of Varnadharma and that untouchability can never be a necessary outcome of this pure division of duties. If this Varnashrama cannot be revived in its original simplicity and purity, persons like me would consider it to be a calamity. Others may welcome it, but let Varnadharma and untouchability stand or fall on their own merits or demerits. Confusing the two can only add to the difficulty of removal of untouchability, which all reformers and even many Sanatanists desire. The caste-abolitionists must, therefore, hold their souls in patience and join the battle against the common and admitted evil of untouchability.

Varnashrama, as I interpret it, satisfies the religious, social and economic needs of a community. It satisfies the religious needs because a whole community accepting the law is free to devote ample time to spiritual perfection. Observance of the law obviates social evils and entirely prevents the killing economic competition. And if it is regarded as a law laying down, not the rights or the privileges of the community governed by it, but their duties, it ensures the fairest possible distribution of wealth, though it may not be an ideal, i.e. strictly equal distribution. Therefore, when people in disregard of the law mistake duties for privileges and try to pick and choose occupations for self-advancement, it leads to confusion of Varna and ultimate disruption of society. In this law, there is no question of compelling any person to follow the parental occupation against his or her aptitude; that is to say, there can be no compulsion from without as there was none for, perhaps, several thousand years, during which the law of Varnashrama worked without interruption. By training, the people had recognized the duty and the justice of the law, and they voluntarily lived under it. Today, nations are living in ignorance and breach of that law and they are suffering for it. The so-called civilized nations have by no means reached a state which they can at all regard with equanimity and satisfaction.



It is easy enough to see that this conception of Varnashrama has nothing to do with restrictions as to inter-dining and inter-marriages. The Vedas and the Mahabharata are filled with illustrations both of inter-dining and inter-marriage. But these are matters of choice, not a matter of religious regulation. No one can be compelled or required to dine with any other or contract marital relations. No doubt social habits will grow up and regulate these things more or less rigidly. But it would be wrong to dignify them by the name of the religious observances. Therefore, inter-dining and inter-marriage can form no part of the campaign against untouchability. In so far as they are a matter for reform, they must be treated, in my opinion, as an absolutely separate subject, unconnected either with untouchability or even with Varnashrama reform. So far as the multiplicity of castes apart from Varnadharmas are concerned, they are essentially trade guilds or societies, with inter-marriage and inter-dining restrictions of a more or less rigid character superimposed upon them. Castes are numerous as the leaves of the famous banyan tree whose every branch becomes a trunk for shooting out more branches. They are undergoing a perpetual transformation. Many have disappeared and new ones are appearing. Surely, they have nothing to do with Varnashrama; nor have they anything to do with religion. That today they are regarded by Sanatanists as an integral part of Hinduism arises, in my opinion, from an utter ignorance of the working of these trade guilds. There are undoubtedly many undesirable practices that have crept into these corporations, but that is only because Hinduism as a religion has ceased to be a living, vitalizing force. We are today living upon capital which is itself being fast exhausted.

*Harijan*, 4-3-'33, p. 5

### III

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "A Graduate's Difficulty")

A graduate correspondent wants to know why I say that the practice of untouchability is common to all mankind and religions and that it is a necessary institution.

When we perform natural functions involving uncleanness or have unclean diseases, we are untouchable till we have become clean. The extent of untouchability and the methods of becoming clean no doubt vary among the nations, but the practice of such untouchability, be its extent ever so small, is common to all including the so-called savage nations. It is a sound hygienic rule when it is intelligently observed. But it was reserved to modern Hinduism to brand a person as untouchable by birth and call him an offspring of sin. It is a most tragic spectacle that a religion, which boasts that Ahimsa is the highest thing in life, should carry vindictiveness into the other world. It is against this insane untouchability that I have invited all Hindus who are proud of their faith and jealous of its purity to wage relentless war.

The same correspondent further asks, "Does not your Varnadharma deprive people of all chances of rise in the social scale? Should not every one have the permission to follow what occupation he likes?"

According to my conception of Varna all inequality is ruled out of life. Inequality of intellect or in material possessions ought not to mean inequality of social status. I do most emphatically maintain that man is not made to choose his occupation for 'rising in the social scale'. He is made to serve his fellowman and earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. And since the primary wants of all are the same, all labour should carry the same value.

This law Hinduism discovered and called the Law of Varna, and carried it out in practice more or less perfectly with amazing success. What we see today in Hinduism is its caricature. It is my certain conviction that obedience to that law alone can save the perishing world. Its conscious recognition means contentment and consequent freeing of human energy for the moral uplift. Its disregard spells unhealthy discontent, greed, cut-throat competition and moral stagnation ending in spiritual suicide. This law, as I understand it, is not and never has been a mere ceremonial rule regulating the restrictions on eating and marrying.



## UNTOUCHABILITY—NO PART OF HINDUISM

(From "What Is Hinduism?")

If untouchability was a part of the Hindu creed, I should decline to call myself a Hindu and most decidedly embrace some other faith if it satisfied my highest aspirations. Fortunately for me, I hold that untouchability is no part of Hinduism. On the contrary it is a serious blot upon it, which every lover of it must sacrifice himself to remove. Suppose, however, I discovered that untouchability was really an integral part of Hinduism, I should have to wander in the wilderness because the other creeds as I know them through their accepted interpreters would not satisfy my highest aspirations.

*Young India*, 24-4-'24, p. 136

## WHAT DETERMINES THE MAN ?

(From an article which appeared under the title "Its Implications")

The vast meeting at Palni under the shadow of the Temple was perfectly silent; there were no noises. I seized the occasion to give the audience the implications of removal of untouchability. It began with touch but it would be a wooden thing, if it merely ended there. A Brahmana may be a depraved man in spite of his learning. It would be preposterous to call him one. A Brahmana is one who knows Brahma. It is character, not occupation, that determines the man. The Bhangi is or should be on a par with the Brahmana in all social relations. There is no reason why he should not, other things being equal, occupy the chair which Maulana Abul Kalam Azad occupies with distinction. I would be happy to see the day when a Bhangi, working as such, is in the Presidential Chair.

The ulcer of untouchability has gone so deep down that it seems to pervade our life. Hence the unreal differences:

Brahmana and non-Brahmana, provinces and provinces, religion and religion. Why should there be all this poison smelling of untouchability? Why should we not all be children of one Indian family and, further, of one human family? Are we not like branches of the same tree?

When untouchability is rooted out, these distinctions will vanish and no one will consider himself superior to any other. Naturally, exploitation too will cease and co-operation will be the order of the day.

*Harijan*, 10-2-'46, p. 4

## THE CANKER OF SUPERIORITY

The following remarkable paper handed to me at Mymensingh by the District Vaishya Sabha Association cannot fail to be of general interest:

"1. Our Samiti aims at unity and regeneration of our community.

"2. Your mission as we understand it is threefold: (a) Introduction and spread of Khaddar and Charkha; (b) Hindu-Muslim unity; (c) Removal of untouchability.

The first two are common to all. We have come to you mainly in connection with the third item and beg leave to give you an idea as to how untouchability stands in the way of unification of the Hindus in Bengal.

3. In Bengal Hindu society may be principally grouped into two classes.

(i) Jal Acharniya

(ii) Anacharaniya

Group (i) consists of:

Brahmanas

Baidyas

Kayasthas

Navashakas (meaning 9 or 10 castes)

Group (ii) consists of:

Baishyashahas

Subarnabaniks (goldsmiths)

Sutradhars (carpenters)

Jogis (weavers)



Sundis (wine sellers)  
 Fishermen  
 Bhui Malis (sweepers)  
 Dhopas (washermen)  
 Muchis or Reshees (cobblers and drummers)  
 Kapaliks  
 Namashudras, and others

Some of these are classified as depressed classes by the Census authorities.

“Of the first group the first three classes claim to dominate the rest of the Hindu society and not only do they despise them (particularly those belonging to group ii) at heart, but oppress them in various ways, e.g. (i) Freedom of worship in or access to public temples not allowed; (ii) Mess and hostel difficulties of the students of the 2nd group; (iii) Entrance into hotels and sweetmeat shop resented.

“In Bengal those who are taking lead in the movement for removal of untouchability are not, in our opinion, adopting the right method and have not made any appreciable progress in this direction.

“According to the census of 1921, of the total Hindu population of Bengal numbering 2,09,40,000 and odd the Brahmanas (13,09,000 i.e. 17%) Kayasthas (12,97,000 i.e. 16%) and Baidyas (1,03,000 i.e. 1%) together count only 28,09,000 or thereabout.

“Baishyashaha community of East Bengal and Sylhet—one of the premier mercantile communities in Bengal—are mainly confined to parts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, Rajshahi, Faridpur, Dacca, Noakhali, Chittagong, Tippera and Sylhet, the total population coming up to 3,60,000, i.e.  $3\frac{1}{2}\%$  of the entire Hindu population of Bengal.

“Literacy per mile among the Baishyashahas is 342; while that of

Baidyas	662	Subarnabanik	383
Brahmanas	484	Gandhabanik	344
Kayasthas	413		

“Literacy is much less amongst all other Acharaniya classes not to speak of those held Anacharaniya.

“Our community does not lag behind others in founding and maintaining educational and charitable institutions, e.g. several colleges, many High and M. E. Schools and charitable dispensaries

and hospitals, tanks, pacca wells etc. besides private donations to institutions, educational, charitable and religious.

“In point of manners, customs and hospitality this community yields to no other class. As regards female education this community is by no means less advanced.

“In spite of all these we are treated as if we are outside the pale of Hindu society. And up till now no sincere attempt has been made to recognize our proper status in the Hindu community, although the members of these communities never keep aloof from taking part in all national movements. But for the social disabilities and difficulties attendant thereon this community could be much more useful.

“This community is quite distinct from the Sundies. Taking advantage of the fact that the Sundies also use the surname ‘Shaha’ the narrow-minded members of the Hindu society envious of our prosperity have been maliciously and falsely stigmatizing this community by classing them with the Sundies (liquor traders). We have, however, succeeded to a great extent to remove the mischievous and wrong notions created as above, establishing from history that this community belonging to Baishya Barna migrated from time to time for trading purposes from North Western India and settled in parts of East Bengal and Sylhet, and that as this community could not shake off the Buddhistic influence as easily as the other classes when Brahmanism revived, they were not given a proper place in the Hindu society and left in a despised condition.

“For the purpose of ameliorating our condition and for having our proper status recognized, we have formed associations which are doing considerable work.

“Total removal of untouchability is in the opinion of this community essential to solidarity of the Hindus and consequently to Hindu-Muslim unity. We approach you, Mahatmaji, with the request that in your public utterances regarding untouchability, you will not lose sight of the peculiar features of the Hindu society in Bengal as we have tried to give you an idea of; and we solicit your advice, as of one who is a born devotee to and fighter for the cause of the down-trodden, in our fight with the bureaucracy in the Hindu society.”

It is likely that there is some exaggeration in the foregoing statement. But the reason why I have reproduced



the paper is to show how deep the canker of superiority has eaten into the very vitals of Hinduism. The writers, themselves a despised group in the estimation of their so-called superiors, have not hesitated to claim for themselves a status superior to and distinct from those more despised. The same notion of superiority and inferiority runs through the despised 'untouchables'! I notice through my tour in Cutch that as in other parts of India, 'the untouchables' have among themselves also superior and inferior castes, and the higher caste Antyaj will not touch the lower caste, will positively refuse to send their children to those belonging to the lower caste. Inter-marriage and inter-dining between them is unthinkable. This is caste reduced to the grossest absurdity. And it is by way of protest against this arrogation of superiority by one class over another that I delight in calling myself a Bhangi, that is a sweeper, beyond which so far as I am aware, inferiority does not travel. He is the social leper shunned by all and yet he belongs to the one group more indispensable than any other for the sanitary wellbeing of society, and therefore its very physical existence. My sympathies are all with gentlemen on whose behalf the foregoing statement was given to me. But I warn them against claiming superiority over men more unfortunately placed than themselves. Let it be their privilege to take even these with them and refuse to take privileges which may be denied to others. It is necessary if we will rid Hinduism of the curse of unnatural inequalities for some of us to rise with our whole soul in revolt against it. In my opinion, he who claims superiority by the very nature of the claim forfeits it. Real, natural superiority comes without the claiming. It is recognized ungrudgingly, and ever refused not pompously, not out of a false sense of modesty, but because the superiority is not even felt, and because the superior man knows that there is no distinction whatsoever between the soul within himself and the soul within one who regards himself as his inferior. Recognition of the essential identity and oneness of all that lives excludes the very idea of superiority and inferiority. Life is duty, not a bundle of rights and privileges. That religion is doomed to destruction which bases itself upon a system of gradations

high and low. Such is not the meaning for me of Varnashrama. I believe in it because I imagine that it defines the duties of men belonging to different vocations. And Brahmana is he who is the servant of all, even the Shudras and the 'untouchables'. He dedicates his all to such service and lives upon the charity and sufferance of his fellow-beings. He is no Kshatriya who puts forth pretensions to rank, power and privileges. He alone is Kshatriya who uses the whole of himself for the defence and honour of society. And a Vaishya who earns for himself only, and believes in merely amassing wealth is a thief. A Shudra because he labours for hire on behalf of society is in no way inferior to the three classes. According to my conception of Hinduism there is no such thing as a fifth or 'untouchable' class. The so-called untouchables are as much privileged labourers of society as Shudras. Varnashrama seems to me to be an ideal system conceived for the highest good of society. What we see today is a travesty and a mockery of the original. And if Varnashrama is to abide, Hindus must sweep away the mockery and restore Varnashrama to its pristine dignity.

*Young India*, 5-11-'25, p. 379

## THE SUPPRESSED CLASSES

Mr. Gandhi presided at the suppressed classes conference held at Ahmedabad on the 14th and 15th instant. There was a large attendance of ladies and gentlemen from the town, though the number of the untouchables was much less than expected, a rumour having spread in the town that Government would arrest those of them who attended.

Mr. Gandhi regretted in the beginning this small attendance, and said that, incidents as the present, took away what little faith he had in conferences as an effective agency of social reform. If therefore, he occupied the audience shorter than they expected, it would be because his remarks would not reach all he meant to address and not because his enthusiasm for the work was in any way damped. He was also thankful for the fact that the conference had



brought him the pleasure of meeting friends on the same platform — it was not usual for him nowadays to meet — friends, co-operation with whom used to be a pleasure and privilege, but from whom the present conditions had unfortunately cut him off. It was happy, however, that on the question of untouchability he was in the same boat as they.

Coming to the subject he said: “ I do not know how I am to convince those who oppose the reform, of the wrong position they have taken. How am I to plead with those who regard any contact with the members of the suppressed community as entailing defilement and of which they cannot be cleansed without necessary ablutions and who thus regard omission to perform the ablutions a sin? I can only place before them my innermost convictions.

“ I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. This idea was not brought home to me by my bitter experiences during the S. African struggle. It is not due to the fact that I was once an agnostic. It is equally wrong to think, as some people do, that I have taken my views from my study of Christian religious literature. These views date as far back as the time when I was neither enamoured of, nor was acquainted with, the Bible or the followers of the Bible.

“ I was hardly yet twelve when this idea had dawned on me. A scavenger named Uka, an untouchable, used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him, why I was forbidden to touch him. If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform the ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that it was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

“ While at school I would often happen to touch the ‘ untouchables ’ and as I never would conceal the fact from my parents, my mother would tell me that the shortest cut

to purification after the unholy touch was to cancel the touch by touching any Musalman passing by. And simply out of reverence and regard for my mother I often did so, but never did so believing it to be a religious obligation. After sometime we shifted to Porbandar, where I made my first acquaintance with Sanskrit. I was not yet put to an English school, and my brother and I were placed in charge of a Brahmana who taught us *Rama Raksha* and *Vishnu Puja*. The text “*jale Vishnuh*” “*sthale Vishnuh*” (there is the Lord (present) in water, there is the Lord (present) in earth), have never gone out of my memory. A motherly old dame used to live close by. Now it happened that I was very timid then, and would conjure up ghosts and goblins whenever the lights went out, and it was dark. The old mother, to disabuse me of fears, suggested that I should mutter the *Rama Raksha* texts whenever I was afraid, and all evil spirits would fly away. This I did and, as I thought, with good effect. I could never believe then that there was any text in the *Rama Raksha* pointing to the contact of the ‘untouchables’ as a sin. I did not understand its meaning then, or understood it very imperfectly. But I was confident that *Rama Raksha*, which could destroy all fears of ghosts, could not be countenancing any such thing as fear of contact with the ‘untouchables’.

“The Ramayana used to be regularly read in our family. A Brahmana called Ladha Maharaj used to read it. He was stricken with leprosy, and he was confident that a regular reading of the Ramayana would cure him of leprosy, and indeed, he was cured of it. ‘How can the Ramayana,’ I thought to myself, ‘in which one who is regarded nowadays as an ‘untouchable’, took Rama across the Ganges in his boat, countenance the idea of any human beings being ‘untouchables’ on the ground that they were polluted souls’? The fact that we addressed God as the ‘purifier of the polluted’ and by similar appellations, shows that it is a sin to regard anyone born in Hinduism as polluted or untouchable — that it is satanic to do so. I have hence been never tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I do not pretend that this thing has crystallized as a conviction in me at the age of twelve, but I do



say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin. I narrate this story for the information of the Vaishnavas and orthodox Hindus.

“ I have always claimed to be a Sanatani Hindu. It is not that I am quite innocent of the scriptures. I am not a profound scholar of Sanskrit. I have read the Vedas and Upanishads only in translations. Naturally therefore mine is not a scholarly study of them. My knowledge of them is in no way profound, but I have studied them as I should do as a Hindu and I claim to have grasped their true spirit. By the time I had reached the age of 21, I had studied other religions also.

“ There was a time when I was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity. When I recovered my balance of mind, I felt that to me salvation was possible only through the Hindu religion and my faith in Hinduism grew deeper and more enlightened.

“ But even then I believed that untouchability was no part of Hinduism; and, if it was, such Hinduism was not for me.

“ True Hinduism does not regard untouchability as a sin. I do not want to enter into any controversy regarding the interpretation of the Shastras. It might be difficult for me to establish my point by quoting authorities from the Bhagavata or Manu Smriti. But I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism has sinned in giving sanction to untouchability. It has degraded us, made us the pariahs of the Empire. Even the Musalmans caught the sinful contagion from us, and in S. Africa, in E. Africa and in Canada the Musalmans no less than Hindus came to be regarded as pariahs. All this evil has resulted from the sin of untouchability.

“ I may here recall my proposition, which is this. So long as the Hindus wilfully regard untouchability as part of their religion, so long as the mass of Hindus consider it a sin to touch a section of their brethren, Swaraj is impossible of attainment. Yudhishtira would not enter heaven without his dog. How can, then, the descendants of that Yudhishtira expect to obtain Swaraj without the untouchables? What crimes, for which we condemn the

Government as satanic, have not we been guilty of towards our untouchable brethren?

“ We are guilty of having suppressed our brethren; we make them crawl on their bellies; we have made them rub their noses on the ground; with eyes red with rage, we push them out of railway compartments — what more than this has British rule done? What charge, that we bring against Dyer and O’dwyer, may not others, and even our own people, lay at our doors? We ought to purge ourselves of this pollution. It is idle to talk of Swaraj so long as we do not protect the weak and the helpless, or so long as it is possible for a single Swarajist to injure the feelings of any individual. Swaraj means that not a single Hindu or Muslim shall for a moment arrogantly think that he can crush with impunity meek Hindus or Muslims. Unless this condition is fulfilled we will get Swaraj only to lose it the next moment. We are no better than the brutes until we have purged ourselves of the sins we have committed against our weaker brethren.

“ But I have faith in me still. In the course of my peregrinations in India I have realized that the spirit of kindness of which the poet Tulasidas sings so eloquently, which forms the corner-stone of Jain and Vaishnava religions, which is the quintessence of the Bhagavata and which every verse of the Gita is saturated with — this kindness, this love, this charity, is slowly but steadily gaining ground in the hearts of the masses of this country.

“ . . . I have also realized that those whom we regard as illiterate and ignorant are the very people who deserve to be called educated. They are more cultured than we, their lives are more righteous than ours. A little study of the present day mentality of the people will show that according to the popular conception, Swaraj is synonymous with Ramarajya — the establishment of the Kingdom of Righteousness on earth.

“ If it can bring any comfort to you, my untouchable brethren, I would say that your question does not cause so much stir as it used to do formerly. That does not mean that I expect you to cease to have misgivings about the Hindus. How can they deserve to be not mistrusted having



wronged you so much? Swami Vivekananda used to say that the untouchables were not depressed, they were suppressed by the Hindus who in turn had suppressed themselves by suppressing them.

“I suppose I was at Nellore on the 6th of April. I met the untouchables there and I prayed that day as I have done today. I do want to attain Moksha. I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I, therefore, prayed that if I should be born again, I should do so not as a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra, but as an Atishudra.

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“I love scavengering. In my Ashram, an eighteen year old Brahmana lad is doing scavenger's work in order to teach the Ashram scavenger cleanliness. The lad is no reformer. He was born and bred in orthodoxy. He is a regular reader of the Gita and faithfully performs *sandhya-vandana*. His pronunciation of Sanskrit verses is more faultless than mine. When he conducts the prayer, his soft sweet melodies melt one into love. But he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had become also a perfect sweeper, and that, if he wanted the Ashram sweeper to do his work well, he must do it himself and set an example.

“You should realize that you are cleaning Hindu society. You have therefore to purify your lives. You should cultivate the habits of cleanliness, so that no one may point his finger at you. Use alkali, ash or earth, if you cannot afford to use soap, to keep yourselves clean. Some of you are given to drinking and gambling which you must get rid of. You will point your finger at the Brahmanas and say even they are given to these vices. But they are not looked upon as polluted, and you are. You must not ask the Hindus to emancipate you as a matter of favour. Hindus must do so, if they want, in their own interests. You should, therefore, make them feel ashamed by your own purity and cleanliness. I believe that we shall have purified ourselves within the next five months. If my expectations are not

fulfilled, I will think that, although my proposition was fundamentally correct, yet I was wrong in my calculation; and I will again say that I had erred in my calculation.

“You claim to be Hindus; you read the Bhagavata; if, therefore, the Hindus oppress you, then you should understand that the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion but in those who profess it. In order to emancipate yourselves you shall have to purify yourselves. You shall have to get rid of evil habits like drinking.

“If you want to ameliorate your condition, if you want to obtain Swaraj, you should be self-reliant....Let me tell you that you will never be able to obtain redress by discarding Hindu religion....Your emancipation lies in your own hands.

“I have come into contact with the untouchables all over the country; and I have observed that immense possibilities lie latent in them of which neither they nor the rest of the Hindus seem to be aware. Their intellect is of virginal purity. I ask you to learn spinning and weaving, and if you take them up as a profession, you will keep poverty from your doors. As regards your attitude towards the Bhangis, I will repeat what I said at Godhra. I cannot understand why you should yourselves countenance the distinction between Dheds and Bhangis. There is no difference between them. Even in normal times their occupation is as honourable as that of lawyers or Government servants.

“You should now cease to accept leavings from plates however clean they may be represented to be. Receive grain only—good, sound grain, not rotten grain, and that too only if it is courteously offered. If you are able to do all I have asked you to do, you will secure your emancipation, not in four or five months, but in so many days.

“The Hindus are not sinful by nature—they are sunk in ignorance. Untouchability must be extinct in this very year. Two of the strongest desires that keep me in flesh and bone are the emancipation of the untouchables and the protection of the cow. When these two desires are fulfilled, there is Swaraj, and therein lies my own Moksha. May God give you strength to work out your salvation.”

*Young India*, 27-4-'21, p. 135 and 4-5-'21 p. 143



## SLOW DISINTEGRATION OF HINDUISM

(From "Conundrums"—Translated from *Harijanbandhu*, dated 24-1-1937, by Pyarelal)

*Q.*: You say that Hinduism must perish if untouchability lives. But Hinduism has continued to exist all these years in spite of the institution of untouchability, and there is no reason why it should be otherwise now or in future. Nor should you forget that it is Hinduism with its much-abused institution of untouchability that, on your own admission, has in the past brought you spiritual peace and consolation.

*Gandhiji's answer:*

My correspondent's argument here altogether lacks point. The slow disintegration of Hinduism one can see even today taking place under our very nose, mainly and principally in consequence of the course of untouchability. Anyone who has eyes can see it. A moribund, life-in-death sort of existence should not be mistaken for life; in fact it is more distressing than death itself. If a person like me can today derive spiritual force and consolation from Hinduism, it is because I have never regarded untouchability as an integral part of Hinduism. It may perhaps be objected that the term 'disintegration of Hinduism' which I have used is misleading since disintegration of Hindu society need not necessarily mean the disintegration of Hindu religion. The objection is based on a fallacy and is only partly valid. In mundane sense a faith can have no existence apart from its votaries. It may personally console me even if I can bear witness to my faith as its sole surviving representative; but of what avail would it be to those millions who fell away from it?

*Harijan*, 20-2-'37, p. 9

## THE GREATEST BLOT ON HINDUISM

(The following paragraphs are taken from an article published under the title "Untouchability".)

Untouchability as at present practised is the greatest blot on Hinduism. It is (with apologies to Sanatanists) against the Shastras. It is against the fundamental principles of humanity, it is against the dictates of reason that a man should, by mere reason of birth, be for ever regarded as an untouchable, even unapproachable and unseeable. These adjectives do not convey the full meaning of the thing itself. It is a crime for certain men, women and their children to touch, or to approach within stated distances, or to be seen by those who are called caste Hindus. The tragedy is that millions of Hindus believe in this institution as if it was enjoined by the Hindu religion.

Happily, Hindu reformers have recoiled with horror from this practice. They have come to the conclusion that it has no support in the Hindu Shastras taken as a whole. Isolated texts torn from context and considered by themselves can no doubt be produced in support of this practice, as of any evil known to mankind. But there is abundant authority in the Shastras to warrant the summary rejection, as being un-Hindu, of anything or any practice that is manifestly against the fundamental principles of humanity or morality, of Ahimsa or Satya.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'33, p. 4



## UNTOUCHABILITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The following is a free rendering of Mr. Gandhi's speech at the Untouchability Conference held at Belgaum during the Congress Week:

Friends,

It was hardly necessary to ask me to express my views on the subject of untouchability. I have declared times without number from various public platforms that it is the prayer of my heart that if I should fail to obtain Moksha in this very birth I might be born a Bhangi in my next. I believe in Varnashrama both according to birth and to Karma. But I do not regard Bhangis as in any sense a low order. On the contrary I know many Bhangis who are worthy of reverence. On the other hand there are Brahmanas going about whom it would be very difficult to regard with any reverence. Holding these views, therefore, if there is a rebirth in store for me, I wish to be born a pariah in the midst of pariahs, because thereby I would be able to render more effective service to them and also to be in a better position to plead with other communities on their behalf.

But just as I do not want the so-called touchables to despise the untouchables, so also I do not want the latter to entertain any feeling of hatred and ill-will towards the former. I do not want them to wrest their rights by violence as is done in the West. The trend of world opinion is against such violence. I can clearly see a time coming in the world when it will be impossible to secure rights by arbitrament of force, so I tell my untouchable brethren today as I tell the Government, that if they resort to force for the attainment of their purpose they shall certainly fail.

I want to uplift Hinduism. I regard the untouchables as an integral part of the Hindu community. I am pained when I see a single Bhangi driven out of the fold of Hinduism. But I do not believe that all class distinctions can be obliterated. I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The Gita teaches us that

members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis. It does not prescribe the same Dharma for the Brahmana as for the Bhangi. But it insists that the latter shall be entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning. It is therefore our duty to see that the untouchables do not feel that they are despised or looked down upon. Let them not be offered leavings from our plates for their subsistence. How can I accord differential treatment to any person, be he Brahmana or Bhangi, who worships the same God and keeps his body and soul pure and clean? I for one would regard myself as having sinned if I gave to a Bhangi unclean food from the leavings from the kitchen or failed to render him personal assistance when he was in need.

Let me make my position absolutely clear. While I do hold that the institution of untouchability as it stands today has no sanction in Hinduism, Hinduism does recognize untouchability in a limited sense and under certain circumstances. For instance, every time that my mother handled unclean things she became untouchable for the time being and had to cleanse herself by bathing. As a Vaishnava I refuse to believe that anyone can be regarded untouchable by reason of his or her birth, and such untouchability as is recognized by religion is by its very nature transitory, easily removable and referable to the deed not the doer. Not only that. Just as we revere our mother for the sanitary service that she renders us when we are infants, and the greater her service the greater is our reverence for her, similarly the Bhangis are entitled to our highest reverence for the sanitary service they perform for society.

Now another point. I do not regard inter-dining and inter-marriage as essential to the removal of untouchability. I believe in Varnashramadharma. But I eat with Bhangis. I do not know whether I am a Sannyasi, for I seriously doubt whether in the Kaliyuga, it is at all possible for any one to fulfil the conditions prescribed for a Sannyasi. But I am moving deliberately in the direction of Sannyasa. It is, therefore, not only not necessary for me to observe these restrictions but their observance may be even harmful for



me. As regards the question of inter-marriage, it does not arise in cases like mine. Sufficient for me to say that my scheme does not include inter-marriage. Let me tell you that in my own clan all the members do not inter-dine. In certain cases among our Vaishnava families they do not use each other's utensils or even cook food on fire fetched from others' kitchens. You may call this practice superstitious, but I do not regard it as such. It certainly does no harm to Hinduism. In my Ashram, Dudhabhai, one of the untouchable inmates, dines with the rest without any distinction. But I do not recommend anybody outside the Ashram to follow this example. Again, you know the esteem in which I hold Malaviyaji. I would wash his feet. But he would not take food touched by me. Am I to resent it as a mark of contempt? Certainly not, because I know that no contempt is meant.

The religion to which I belong prescribes for our observance *Maryada Dharma*. The Rishis of old carried on exhaustive researches through meditation, and as a result of the researches they discovered some great truths, such as have no parallel perhaps in any other religion. One of these was that they regarded certain kinds of foods as injurious for the spiritual wellbeing of man. So they interdicted their use. Now suppose some one had to travel abroad and live among strange people with different customs and standards as regards their diet. Knowing as they did how compelling sometimes the force of the social customs of the people among whom men lived was, they promulgated *Maryada Dharma* to help one in such emergencies. Though however I believe in *Maryada Dharma*, I do not regard it as an essential part of Hinduism. I can even conceive a time when these restrictions might be abolished with impunity. But the reform contemplated in the untouchability movement does not obliterate the restriction as to inter-dining and inter-marrying. I cannot recommend the wholesale abolition of these restrictions to the public even at the risk of being charged with hypocrisy and inconsistency. For instance, I let my son dine freely in Musalman households because I believe he can take sufficient care as to what to take and what not to take. I myself have no scruples in

taking my food in Musalman households because I have my own strict rules about my diet. Let me tell you of an incident that happened at Aligarh. Swami Satyadeva and I were Khwajasaheb's guests. Swami Satyadeva did not share my views. We argued about them. I told him that holding the views I did, it would be as wrong of me to refuse to partake of the food offered by a Musalman as it would be on his part to transgress his *Maryada*. So Swami Satyadeva was provided with separate cooking arrangements. Similarly when I was Barisaheb's guest he provided us with a Brahmana cook with strict instructions to obtain all the rations for us fresh from the bazar. When asked why he put himself to such inconvenience he explained that he did so because he wanted to avoid the slightest possibility of suspicion on the part of the public that he entertained any secret designs of proselytization against me or my companions. That single incident raised Barisaheb in my esteem. He sometimes commits mistakes but he is as simple and innocent as a child. And although sometimes people complain of him to me bitterly, my first impression of him still remains.

I have dwelt on this point at such great length, because I want to be absolutely plain with you (untouchables). I do not want to employ diplomacy in my dealings with you or for that matter with anyone. I do not want to keep you under any false illusion or win your support by holding out temptations. I want to remove untouchability because its removal is essential for Swaraj and I want Swaraj. But I would not exploit you for gaining any political ends of mine. The issue with me is bigger even than Swaraj. I am anxious to see an end put to untouchability because for me it is an expiation and a penance. It is not the untouchables whose *shuddhi* I effect—the thing would be absurd—but my own and that of Hindu religion. Hinduism has committed a great sin in giving sanction to this evil and I am anxious—if such a thing as vicarious penance is possible to purify it of that sin by expiating for it in my own person.

That being so, it follows that the only means open to me for my purpose are those of Ahimsa and truth. I



have adopted an untouchable child as my own. I confess I have not been able to convert my wife completely to my view. She cannot bring herself to love her as I do. But I cannot convert my wife by anger; I can do so only by love. If any of my people have done you any wrong, I ask your forgiveness for it. Some members of the untouchable class said when I was at Poona that they would resort to force if the Hindus did not alter their attitude towards them. Can untouchability be removed by force? Can the amelioration of untouchables come through these methods? The only way by which you and I can wean orthodox Hindus from their bigotry is by patient argument and correct conduct. So long as they are not converted, I can only ask you to put up with your lot with patience. I am willing to stand by you and share your sufferings with you. You must have the right of worship in any temple in which members of other castes are admitted. You must have admission to schools along with the children of other castes without any distinction. You must be eligible to the highest office in the land not excluding even that of the Viceroy's. That is my definition of the removal of untouchability.

But I can help you in this only by following the way indicated by my religion and not by following Western methods. For that way I cannot save Hinduism. Yours is a sacred cause. Can one serve a sacred cause by adopting Satan's methods? I pray you, therefore, to dismiss from your mind the idea of ameliorating your condition by brute force. The Gita tells us that by sincerely meditating on Him in one's heart, one can attain Moksha. Meditation is waiting on God. If waiting on God brings the highest bliss or salvation, how much quicker must it bring removal of untouchability? Waiting on God means increasing purity. Let us by prayer purify ourselves and we shall not only remove untouchability but shall also hasten the advent of Swaraj.

*Young India*, 22-1-'25, p. 29

## WHY 'HARIJAN'?

Several correspondents have asked me why I have adopted the name 'Harijan' for 'untouchable'. Some English friends have asked me for its meaning. It is not a name of my coining. Some years ago, several untouchable correspondents complained that I used the word *Asprushya* in the pages of *Navajivan*. *Asprushya* means literally untouchable. I then invited them to suggest a better name and one of the untouchable correspondents suggested the adoption of the name 'Harijan', on the strength of its having been used by the first known poet-saint of Gujarat. Though the quotation he sent me did not exactly fit the case he wanted to make out for the adoption, I thought that it was a good word. 'Harijan' means 'a man of God'. All the religions of the world describe God, pre-eminently as the Friend of the friendless, Help of the helpless and Protector of the weak. The rest of the world apart, in India who can be more friendless, helpless or weaker than the forty million or more Hindus of India who are classified as untouchables? If, therefore, any body of people can be fitly described as men of God, they are surely these helpless, friendless and despised people. Hence, in the pages of *Navajivan*, since the correspondence, I have always adopted Harijan as the name signifying untouchables. And, when God chose to entrust me with their service even whilst undergoing imprisonment, I could not use any other word for describing them. I recoil with horror from that word and all it implies. Not that the change of name brings about any change of status, but one may at least be spared the use of a term which is itself one of reproach. When caste Hindus have of their own inner conviction and, therefore, voluntarily, got rid of the present day untouchability, we shall all be called Harijans, for, according to my humble opinion, caste Hindus will then have found favour with God and may, therefore, be fitly described as His men.

*Harijan*, 11-2-'33, p. 7



## WHY BHANGI QUARTERS?

Friends are puzzled over my keen desire to reside in Bhangi quarters in the cities or towns I may visit. To ask why I have not entertained that desire all these years would be more pertinent. To answer why I did not have the desire long ago must be reserved for a future occasion. Just now I must answer why the desire has come upon me at all.

I have for some time been saying that we must all be Bhangis or untouchables. But it has worried me that I have not accorded the statement with corresponding action. It may not be possible to establish complete accordance with the wish. But it ought to be done so far as possible. Whilst this thought was agitating me, I got the news which I have already shared with the readers that in Gujarat only one well and one temple is shared with Harijans and this in Karadi. Whether the news is true or not is immaterial here. The material thing is the reaction produced on my mind by the news. To be angry was madness. The news quickened the desire for residence in untouchable quarters. I said to myself: 'If I lived apart from Harijans, what right had I to question the action of others who went further in their adherence to untouchability? But whether the others changed their mode or not was not for me to judge. If it was my duty to reside in Harijan quarters I must perform it irrespective of the reaction of the step on the others.' This is the thought which is possessing me and goading me to the adumbrated action.

Consequently I have asked Sheth R. D. Birla to arrange, if at all possible, for my residence in untouchable quarters when I happen to be in Bombay. I have also wired to Sheth G. D. Birla to arrange likewise for Delhi and Shri Brijkishan Chandiwalla has already asked for my approval of some arrangement he has made. It goes without saying that I must not impose myself on Harijans anywhere. I must not wound their feelings, if they will not tolerate my presence in their midst. But I fear no such thing.

Incidentally, I notice that some critics rejoice that I shall no longer reside in the Birla House. They do not know that I have been accepting their hospitality for years. I have accepted donations from them for my many constructive activities. The critics do not know of the changes they have imperceptibly made in their life; nor need they or the public in general know these. Such changes are never made for show. At the same time it is perfectly true that there are wide differences between them and me in outlook. This is no cause for sorrow or wonder. All true change comes from within. Any change brought about by pressure is worthless. I am neither so vain nor so foolish as to hope that all would follow me. And who can say whether I am right or others in what we are doing? It is enough if all of us abide by what we consider to be right. We are all His creatures to do His will, not ours. Doing so, we should all be friends to one another.

*Harijan*, 31-3-'46, p. 57

## A CRY FOR JUSTICE

(Press Interview, Yeravda Jail, dated 20-9-1932)

If people won't laugh at me, I would gently put forward a claim which I have always asserted that I am a touchable by birth, but an untouchable by choice: and I have endeavoured to qualify myself to represent, not the upper ten even among the untouchables, because be it said to their shame there are castes and classes among them, but my ambition is to represent and identify myself with, as far as possible, the lowest strata of untouchables, namely the "invisibles" and the "unapproachables", whom I have always before my mind's eye wherever I go; for they have indeed drunk deep of the poisoned cup. I have met them in Malabar and in Orissa, and am convinced that if they are ever to rise, it will not be by reservation of seats but will be by the strenuous work of Hindu reformers in their midst, and it is because I feel that this separation would have killed all prospect of reform that my whole soul has



rebelled against it; and, let me make it plain, that the withdrawal of separate electorates will satisfy the letter of my vow but will never satisfy the spirit behind it, and in my capacity of being a self-chosen untouchable I am not going to rest content with a patched up pact between the touchables and the untouchables.

What I want, what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for, is the eradication of untouchability root and branch. I want, therefore, a living pact whose life giving effect should be felt not in the distant tomorrow but today, and therefore, that pact should be sealed by an all-India demonstration of touchables and untouchables meeting together, not by way of a theatrical show, but in real brotherly embrace. It is in order to achieve this, the dream of my life for the past fifty years, that I have entered today the fiery gates. The British Government's decision was the last straw. It was a decisive symptom, and with the unerring eye of the physician that I claim to be in such matters, I detected the symptom. Therefore, for me the abolition of separate electorates would be but the beginning of the end, and I would warn all those leaders assembled at Bombay and others against coming to any hasty decision.

My life I count of no consequence. One hundred lives given for this noble cause would, in my opinion, be poor penance done by Hindus for the atrocious wrongs they have heaped upon helpless men and women of their own faith. I, therefore, would urge them not to swerve an inch from the path of strictest justice. My fast I want to throw in the scales of justice and if it wakes up caste Hindus from their slumber and if they are roused to a sense of their duty, it will have served its purpose. Whereas, if out of blind affection for me, they would somehow or other come to a rough and ready agreement so as to secure the abrogation and then go off to sleep, they will commit a grievous blunder and will have made my life a misery. For, while the abrogation of separate electorates would result in my breaking the fast, it would be a living death for me if the vital pact for which I am striving is not arrived at. It would simply mean that, as soon as I call off the fast, I would have

to give notice of another in order to achieve the spirit of the vow to the fullest extent.

This may look childish to the onlooker but not so to me. If I had anything more to give, I would throw that in also to remove this curse, but I have nothing more than my life.

I believe that if untouchability is really rooted out, it will not only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot but its repercussion will be world-wide. My fight against untouchability is a fight against the impure in humanity.

*Gandhiji—His Life & Work*, Edited by D. G. Tendulkar & others, p. 355

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### WHAT DOES ANTI-UNTOUCHABILITY CAMPAIGN STAND FOR ?

#### I

(From "The Wrong Way")

The reform the anti-untouchability campaign stands for is no mere make-shift for placating Harijans. It stands for a fundamental change in Hindu practice, it stands for the total abolition of the practice of high-and-lowness that has crept into Hinduism in spite of its lofty and unequivocal declaration that all life is one and that differentiation is Maya, is false. Practice of equal treatment of all human beings should be the least direct outcome of that belief not reserved for Sannyasis but for the ordinary man in his ordinary dealings with fellow-men.

*Harijan*, 15-7-'33, p. 4

#### II

(From "Harijan V. Non-Harijan")

"Rather than do constructive work among Harijans, will it not be better to create intense dissatisfaction amongst them with their condition and thus promote such self-help as they can generate among themselves? It is no use your trying to convert the Savarnas." This was one of the questions that was asked at a meeting of workers. As it is



an important question, it is as well to give the gist of the answer given by me at the meeting. The question betrays ignorance of the whole scope of the movement. To create dissatisfaction among the Harijans can bring no immediate relief to them and can only tend to perpetuate a vicious division amongst Hindus. The object of the movement is to do away with this utterly unnatural division and to secure for Harijans the simple justice to which they are entitled at the hands of Savarna Hindus. Thus the movement is one of repentance and reparation. Hence it is confined, on the one hand, to constructive work among Harijans and, on the other, to conversion of Savarnas by persuasion, arguments and, above all, by correct conduct on the part of the reformers. If the latter have gentleness, forbearance and patience, what is scoffed at as irreligion by Sanatanists will presently be regarded as the essence of religion. Has not Manu said, "Know that to be Dharma which is generally observed by the learned, the good and those who are free from passion and hate and which is felt in one's heart"? If, therefore, the reformers possess the qualities insisted upon by Manu, there will be no doubt whatsoever that the hearts of the Sanatanists will respond. Whether they do or not, the service rendered to suppressed humanity by reformers, will be a substantial contribution to human progress and will be its own reward. It will certainly find honourable mention in God's eternal book of life.

*Harijan*, 15-6-'34, p. 140

## RELIGIOUS NATURE OF ANTI-UNTOUCHABILITY CAMPAIGN

(From "Weekly Letter No. 16" by C. S.)

In his tour of Mysore for the anti-untouchability campaign, Gandhiji addressed a mass meeting in a village called Pannampet. The address from the public gave an account of the work done and expressed an objection against the question of untouchability being called religious. It drew the following reply from Gandhiji:

A moment's reflection will show you that it cannot but be a religious question, because we have been told by those who claim to understand Shastras that untouchability is a divine institution. When it comes to me in the garb of religion, I can only meet it by showing that religion has nothing to do with it as we practise it today. Then, take the temple-entry question. What is it, if it is not a religious question? In order to have temples opened, I have got to touch your hearts; and anything that touches one's heart touches one's faith, immediately becomes a religious thing. Indeed, those Sanatanists who claim that untouchability is of divine origin fling the taunt in my face that I know nothing of religion. Of course, I cannot endorse that taunt, for the simple reason that the whole of my life is saturated with the religious spirit. I could not live for a single second without religion. Many of my political friends despair of me, because they say that even my politics are derived from my religion. And they are right. My politics and all other activities of mine, are derived from my religion. I go further and say that every activity of a man of religion must be derived from his religion, because religion means being bound to God, that is to say, God rules your every breath. If you recognize that truth, naturally God regulates every activity of yours. But, then, it is as a man of religion who is trying to live up to it every moment that I am here to tell you that untouchability is not by divine origin. I am here to tell you, after having



searched the Shastras in the manner in which a layman like myself can do, that untouchability is a sin against God and man. I am here to tell you that there is no warrant in the Shastras for untouchability as we practise it today and that, therefore, it is sinful to deny entrance into our temples to Harijans.

*Harijan*, 2-3-'34, p. 19 at p. 23

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## THE INWARDNESS OF HARIJAN MOVEMENT

(Gandhiji's speech at the Kengeri Conference)

**Our Goal**

Whoever conceived the idea of this conference gave vent to a happy idea and we should be able to make good use of this meeting. Though there are at this conference representatives invited from all parts of South India, there are others here too, and instead of confining myself only to the actual work of the delegates, I will make some general observations.

These general observations I shall make for the benefit of the Savarna Hindus. Let them understand that this movement for the removal of untouchability is different from other current movements in India. So far as I am concerned, and so far as the Harijan Sevak Sangh is concerned, the anti-untouchability movement is not a political movement. Nor is it intended purely for the economic amelioration of the Harijans nor yet for their social regeneration. But this does not mean that we do not aim at the Harijans' social, economic or political advancement. We want all these improvements. If we are honest about our work, progress in these directions is bound to follow from our efforts.

But our goal is quite different from the things I have mentioned just now. It is this: that untouchability is a blot upon Hinduism and must be removed at any cost. Untouchability is a poison which, if we do not get rid of it in time, will destroy Hinduism.

I know that those of you who are outside the ranks of workers and delegates—nay, even some of the workers

and delegates—do not realize the real significance of what I am saying. But whether you realize the significance or not, I must continue to express the views which I hold and hold very strongly.

I can see in the continuance of untouchability slow destruction overtaking Hinduism now, and I promise that if you study the thing itself as I am doing, you will observe that the slow disintegration which Hinduism is going through may become so rapid as to make it impossible for the workers to overcome it.

### **No Parallel in the World**

And why do I say that untouchability is a curse, a blot and a powerful poison that will destroy Hinduism? It is repugnant to our sense of humanity to consider a single human being as untouchable by birth. If you were to examine the scriptures of the world and the conduct of peoples other than Hindus, you do not find any parallel to the untouchability I have brought to your attention just now. I can well understand a person being untouchable whilst he is performing a task which he himself would feel makes him untouchable. For instance, a nurse, who is nursing a patient who is helpless and bleeding and soiling his clothes and suffering from a disease giving out from his body a foul smell, such a nurse whilst she is nursing such a patient is untouchable. But when she has washed herself, she becomes as touchable as ourselves. Not only that. She is not only just as fit to move in society as any of us, but she is also adorable for the profession which she follows. She is worthy of our respect and, so long as we have ranks in our society, she must occupy a very high place amongst us.

Now look at the other side of the picture. Take, for instance, Dr. Ambedkar. He is pronounced as belonging to the Depressed Classes and as being untouchable. Intellectually he is superior to thousands of intelligent and educated caste Hindus. His personal cleanliness is as high as that of any of us. Today, he is an eminent lecturer in Law. Tomorrow you may find him a Judge of the High Court. In other words, there is no position in the government of this country to which he may not aspire and rise, and to which an orthodox Brahmana can rise. But that



orthodox Brahmana will be defiled by the touch of Dr. Ambedkar and that because of his unpardonable sin that he was born a Mahar (untouchable)!

If we had not been habituated to think that untouchability by birth is an integral part of Hinduism, we would not conduct ourselves towards our fellow human beings as many of us conduct ourselves even today.

### **How to remove It**

I know that I have told you nothing new in this my talk to you today. I know I have said this same thing in much more burning language than I have done today. Yet what I say is not, and will not be, superfluous so long as this simple fact of the need for the removal of untouchability does not affect your understanding or conduct.

Untouchability is a phenomenon which is peculiar to Hinduism only and it has got no warrant either in reason or in Shastras and what little I have studied of the Shastras and what I have been told by people who have made a deeper study of them shows that there is no warrant for untouchability by birth in Hinduism. I have not the time now to go into the Shastric precepts. Nor is it necessary at this time of the day to give you Shastric proofs for my statement. But what is necessary is that if you are satisfied that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism and that there is a danger of its destroying Hinduism, you must set about removing it.

What will you do to remove it ? If all of you will say that you have done your duty by declaring that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism it will be a mockery. It will not be enough even if you in a flush of enthusiasm go to a Harijan and touch him and embrace him, and then forget all about him. It will not do even if you go to the Harijan quarters every day and make it a point to touch a number of Harijans as a token of your conviction.

What is required of you is that you should regulate your day-to-day conduct in such a manner that you make it absolutely evident to the Harijans whom you come across that a better day has dawned for them all.

You will begin by taking the Harijans along with you to the temple if you are in the habit of going to a temple.

But if you discover that you will not be allowed into the temple along with your Harijan companions then if you have the living belief that I have that untouchability is wrong, you will shun that temple as you shun a scorpion or fire. You will then believe with me that such a temple is not inhabited by God. I will take by way of illustration the greatest temple known all over the world, viz., Kashi Vishwanath in Banaras. The Lord who is supposed to reside there is known as the Lord of the Universe. And yet in the very name of that Vishwanath the Savarna Hindus have today the impudence to say to the Harijans: 'You shall not come to this temple.'

### **No Temples of God**

I claim to be as good a Hindu as any orthodox Hindu. I have endeavoured to enforce all precepts of Hinduism in my own life to the best of my ability. I admit that my ability is small. But that does not affect my attitude to and love for Hinduism. Yet, in spite of all that love for Hinduism, with a due sense of my own responsibility, I am here to tell you that so long as the doors of the Banaras Temple are closed against a single Harijan, Kashi Vishwanath does not reside in that temple and I could not possibly approach that temple with a belief in its sanctity, or in the faith that by worshipping there I should be purified of my sins. I can have no sense of piety in respect of such a temple. And what is true of Kashi Vishwanath is true of every other temple in India which bars its doors to Harijans. It applies of course to all such temples in South India, including the Guruvayur Temple.

Thank God, the gates of the Guruvayur Temple are closed to me. But even supposing the trustees of that temple, or whoever is in authority there, gave me permission to enter that temple, I could not possibly avail myself of it so long as members of the Harijan community are shut out. Unless every one of you here begins in the way I have pointed out, he has not removed untouchability from his heart.

### **A Matter of Duty**

It is absolutely of no consequence that a vast majority of Harijans are uninterested in our campaign. Only this



morning Mr. DeSouza, leading a deputation of Harijaas, told me that the Harijans were not so interested in temple entry as in their political and economic amelioration and perhaps a rise in their social status. Naturally, they cannot think otherwise. For we are responsible for deadening their sense of unity with us and their desire to worship in common with us in our temples.

Therefore, I say that the God of Hinduism is really non-existent for them. It is true that the God of Hinduism is not different from the God in Islam or Christianity. Only the mode of worship is peculiar to each religion. If Harijans, because of our own sins—our own unpardonable treatment towards them—have been taught to consider that the temples visited by Savarnas are not for them, you could not blame them for their indifference in this matter. Force of habit has made them indifferent. That Harijans in Travancore and other parts of India have still got the desire to enter the temples and claim the same right as other Hindus, is a good thing and a comfortable thing, but it does not affect my argument.

#### **Conversion Question Has no Bearing**

There is another aspect of the opening of temples to Harijans which you must not fail to realize. If you open your temples to Harijans because they demand that they shall be so opened, you will not be doing any great thing. But if you open the temples to them because of a sense of sin for which you should atone, it becomes a religious act. I should insist on Hindu temples being thrown open to Harijans even if the Harijans in India were converted to another religion and there was only one Harijan left in the Hindu fold. It is this religious attitude that isolates the Harijan question from all other questions, and gives it a special importance. If our present programme was merely one of policy or political expediency, it would not have the religious significance that it has for me. If it was demonstrated to me to my satisfaction that the political or economic regeneration of Harijans would be enough to retain the Harijans in the Hindu fold, I should still want to open the temples and remove every trace of inequality. Because for me it is, as it must be for you, a question of repentance

and reparation for the wrong we have done to our fellow-men.

Thus the threat of the conversion of Harijans to other religions, which is agitating so many Hindus today, has no bearing on our duty to Harijans. If we begin to quicken our activities, because of the threat of conversion, then such opening will lose the significance which I have outlined. I promise you that Hinduism will not be saved by such means.

Hinduism can only be saved when it has become purified by the performance of our duty without the expectation of any return whatsoever from the Harijans. Nothing less than that can possibly save Hinduism. If you do something by Harijans as a matter of expediency or political manoeuvre, you have not rid yourselves of untouchability in your hearts. There will come many occasions when that poison will erupt on the Hindu social organism to such an extent that we shall be confounded. If we are ashamed of untouchability, we must shed it, no matter what results follow or may not follow.

### **Sheer Cussedness**

I become impatient when Savarna Hindus tell me from their platform of high superiority that they will remove untouchability when Harijans give up their habits of drinking, eating carrion, uncleanness etc. Suppose my father, mother, son or daughter were lepers can I say that I will touch him or her only when he or she has got rid of leprosy? I will be false to our sacred tie if I do not serve him or her in his or her need. The position regarding Harijans is infinitely worse, because we ourselves are responsible for the condition to which Harijans have been reduced. For their drinking, eating carrion, and other unclean habits we are directly responsible. Therefore if we are true, we have to embrace them in spite of their shortcomings and I hope, not without foundation, that immediately you adopt an attitude of mind looking upon the Harijans as your brothers they will change their habits. People who had experience in this direction will confirm this statement. It is, therefore, first necessary that Savarna Hindus should



purify their hearts and change their attitude towards Harijans.

I would ask you, please, not to fling in my face bad cases you may have come across — cases where you befriended Harijans and they refused to improve.

But having uttered this word of caution, I want to give you my evidence. I do not know a single Harijan adopted by a Hindu who has not reformed himself. As a matter of fact, it cannot be otherwise. The Harijan is bound to feel the change to be too good to be true. The novel experience of his improved surroundings will enable him to get rid of the craving for drink or carrion-eating. As for cleanliness it is a question of facilities made available to him. It is merely the cussedness of the Savarna Hindus that employs the arguments about the uncleanness of the Harijans, so that they themselves need not act correctly.

### **“Oh Ye of Little Faith”**

I will close with a material thought. I have told you exactly my views of the duty of every Savarna Hindu to Harijans. There are many more things that the Savarna Hindu can do in his own personal conduct.

But I know that there will be a lot of discussion among members assembled here as to how to conduct the work of Harijan Sevak Sanghs without money. I say to such delegates that the fear comes out of their own want of faith. We want to move not half a dozen Savarna Hindus, we want to touch the hearts of millions of Savarna Hindus. Paupers though we are, we find that no Hindu temple has ever to be closed for want of funds. I invite you to study this phenomenon. But do not run away with the false idea that millions of Hindus always pay to their temples merely out of superstition. There may be a partial truth in that statement. But it is only a partial truth. The better part of the truth is that the people who support these temples by their offerings of pice or rice or cocoanut or *supari*, do so because of an indefinable faith that they are doing an act of piety. And I tell you that you will not be doing justice to yourselves, or to India or to humanity, if you will characterize these things as superstition. I know that superstition is a long-lived

thing. There are many monsters of superstition which have been given a long rope by the Almighty. But however long their life, it is nothing in the cycle of Time. The better half of the truth is that there is some thing undoubtedly holy and true about the faith that takes millions to the temples. If you have faith in the piety of the dumb humanity who support these temples, and faith in your mission, each of you will become little temples and gather pice or rice from the people.

If you remain content with the lazy delusion that a few millionaires like Ghanashyamdas Birla will always send money to you for your work, I assure you that the movement is bound to fail. You will never be able to bring this movement to a successful conclusion unless you realize the need to go to the dumb millions and collect pice or even their rice as a token of their conviction that untouchability is a sin to be got rid of.

### **The Only Way**

Never mind if it takes time before you are successful. Whether it takes a few years or ages you must have unbounded faith that it is the only way to convert Savarna Hindus and bring this message to every Hindu home. Know that time never runs against Truth. And this is downright truth : "You have to get rid of untouchability or perish." Only those become impatient who want to prop up a mission about whose correctness they have a doubt. Have faith that when all the forces that are arrayed against us — and they are mighty forces — have died down, there is still this movement which will go on to purify Hinduism. But if you lose heart, courage and faith and become too lazy to remain on the watch-tower, do not blame people for not paying. The movement will perish not because of external forces but because of internal weakness. I urge every worker to approach the problem in this light.

*Harijan*, 20-6-'36, p. 148



## HARIJANS AND TEMPLE ENTRY

A friend from Wadhwan writes:

“You must be receiving reports about the entry of the Harijans into temples. These days Harijans are taken into temples anyhow with or against the consent of the trustees. One can understand the insistence on getting Harijans admitted to the Vaishnavite *Havelis* or Ramji Mandirs, but one fails to understand what good it can serve to take them into Swami Narayan or Jain temples in which they do not believe. Or, is it supposed that they will develop faith in them, the moment they are admitted there?”

The other letter is from Ahmedabad. It is unsigned and carries only a *nom de plume*: ‘Your oppressed ones’. From the handwriting and the language it is clear that it has not emanated from the pen of the Harijans I know. Its relevant portion is as follows:

“On the festival of *Makar Sankranti* on the 14th, Harijans tried to visit temples. When they reached the Swami Narayan Mandir at 8 a.m. with the *bhajan mandalis* they found the doors shut and fastened with *khambhati* locks. They are squatting there still making Satyagraha. They refuse to go to work. The local Congress Committee has condemned their action. How strange! If they do not come into their rights even after the attainment of independence when will they at all? Local Congressmen go there and return after a few minutes’ stay—there is no serious effort, no effective help and the poor Harijans are left to drown their discomfiture by bawling out devotional songs in bitter cold. Who will end this impasse? There is no man with personality or character among the Congressmen here. In Dakor Shri Ravishankar Maharaj used his influence to get the Harijans admitted into the temple there. Are the Harijans for ever to be baulked of their inherent right? Only your intervention can save the situation. Today for the third day thousands of Harijan Satyagrahis are squatting in front of the temple gates exposed to the inclemencies of the weather. They do not want to go to law. Nor is there a likelihood of the hearts of the so-called Savarnas melting. What will be the end? Would you, please, show the way out?”

The distinction drawn by the writer of the first letter, in my opinion, has no meaning. The Harijans are entitled to and do actually visit Swami Narayan and Jain temples and they should be allowed to do so. For years there has been a movement to secure for the Harijans equal temple-entry rights with the Brahmanas and it has met with considerable success. Now that the Bombay Government have passed a law to that effect, there seems to be no occasion left for Satyagraha. If the law reflects popular opinion it ought to command spontaneous acceptance and respect. If, on the other hand, it is in the teeth of popular opinion, its enforcement will be retarded. In democracy a law cannot be given effect to by force. It calls for discerning circumspection. It will succeed in its object if the reformer makes an intelligent and discriminating use of it. Hurry or impatience will defeat its object.

Trustees are not owners of temples. Even owners cease to have property rights over temples when they are meant for public use. True owners of the temples are the votaries who go there to worship. Regarded in this light, all Jain and Swami Narayan temples are Hindu shrines. I have myself visited these temples. No one ever cared to inquire as to what my sect was. It was enough that I looked like a Hindu. The same holds good of hundreds of other visitors like myself. Therefore, the Harijans must be free to visit all temples that are open to the Hindus. Today, awakened public opinion and the law which embodies that opinion do not regard Harijans as a separate caste, but an integral part of the four or the eighteen Varnas comprising Hindu society. Therefore, the contrary view cannot prevail. It is the devotee's devotion that makes a temple a living shrine. The deity in the temple is only a reflection of the devotee's spirit.

To come to the second letter — in spite of my clear view as being stated above, I fail to appreciate the importunity of the Harijans. The squatters are not true devotees. They do not care for *deva-darshan*; they are running only after their right, and to that extent they are running away from true religion. To write letters anonymously or get others to write them for you is not the mark of a devotee.



A true devotee will follow in the footsteps of Nandanar who disdained help of anybody but God. Today, he commands the homage even of the Brahmana who regards himself as 'high caste'. I look forward to the birth of a Nandanar, among those who have become Harijans by adoption. And I know that must be the wish of the Harijans by birth too. If non-Harijan Hindu society wants, let them take Harijans to their temples and shrines with due regard and respect. If not and pending that consummation, let the Harijans stay in their homes and sanctify them by the purifying Ganga of their devotion. They don't have need to squat or sit *dharna* before any temple. In my opinion such *dharna* carries no merit—it is irreligious, sinful and fit only to be eschewed.

*Harijan*, 1-2-'48, p.1

#### IV. INTER-DINING AND INTER-MARRIAGES

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##### SCRUPLES ABOUT INTER-DINING

(From "Question Box")

*Q.:* I am a Bengali Brahmana widow. Since my widowhood—these 24 years—I have observed strict rules about my food. I have my separate widow's kitchen and utensils even in my own family. I believe in your ideal of truth and non-violence. I am a habitual wearer of Khadi since 1930 and a regular spinner. Our Mahila Samaj has established a Harijan school in a Harijan village in Dacca. I go there and mix with the Harijans. I mix freely with my Muslim sisters towards whom I have nothing but goodwill. But I cannot inter-dine with Harijans or any other non-Brahmana caste. Now can't orthodox widows like me enlist as Satyagrahis, passive and active?

*A. :* According to the Congress constitution you have a perfect right to be enlisted. You can even enforce your right. But since you ask me, I would dissuade you from being enlisted. I know the punctilious way in which Bengali widows observe the rules custom has prescribed for them. But widows who dedicate themselves to the country's cause, and that in a non-violent way, should have no scruples in dining with anybody. I do not believe that dining with people, no matter who they are, hinders spiritual progress. It is the motive which is the deciding factor. If a widow approaches every task in a spirit of service, it is well with her. A widow may observe all the dining and other rules with meticulous care and yet not be a true widow if she is not of a pure heart. You know as well as I do that outward observance of rules governing a society often covers hypocrites. I would, therefore, advise you to disregard the restriction on inter-dining and the like as a hindrance to spiritual and national progress and concentrate on cultivation of the heart. In the Satyagraha *dal* I should like to



have not self-satisfied persons but those who have used their reason and chosen a way of life that has commended itself to both head and heart.

*Harijan*, 15-6-'40, p. 161 at p. 162

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## SOME MISCONCEPTIONS

(The following question and answer thereto by Gandhiji are reproduced from an article which appeared under the title "Some Misconceptions" by M. D.)

*Q.* : You always say that the Harijan campaign has nothing to do with questions of eating and drinking or with the question of marriage. Why then, did you marry your boy Devadas to a Brahmana girl?

*A.* : This is an irrelevant question. But I must answer it. The marriage was no part of the Harijan movement. I did not allow the marriage as a leader of the anti-untouchability campaign, but I allowed it as a Hindu reformer. As a reformer of Hinduism, I want to restore the ancient Varnashramadharma, to its pristine purity. Varnashramadharma lays down the functions and duties of various classes according to their special aptitudes and gifts and has nothing to do with questions of marriage and food and drink. Now that you have raised the question of my son's marriage, I shall summarize the considerations that weighed with me and would weigh with me on all such occasions : (1) The four Varnas do not exist today, and, therefore, it is the duty of those who believe in the Varnas to restore them by observing the sovereign principles of purity and self-restraint. Let me tell you that, when I was told that there was mutual attachment between the two young people in question, I asked them to impose self-restraint on themselves for a period of five years—not to meet each other, not even to correspond with each other—and thus to prove the purity of their attachment. They fulfilled the conditions and even then would not have the marriage until it was blessed by their parents. (2) Even

assuming that Varnas exist, instances are not wanting in Mahabharata and other works, of inter-Varna marriages. (3) After all is said and done, the laws and codes governing personal conduct apply to the times in which they were framed. The ruling principle is self-restraint.

There are, besides, numerous texts in our Smritis which contradict one another, and hence we cannot blindly accept every text as gospel truth. We have to prove them on the touchstone of truth and non-violence. There are things, for instance, in Manusmriti which no author believing in Ahimsa could ever have written and which run counter to the precepts in the same great work, precepts which would do credit to the spiritual genius of any race or clime. I must expunge those texts as apocryphal, as we do in the case of many verses of doubtful authenticity which have crept into a much more recent work like, for instance, Tulasidas' Ramayana. For me, the text of Manu defining Sanatana Dharma—eternal religion—is all sufficing: 'That Dharma is eternal which is always observed by saintly men of learning, free from ill-will and passion, and which appeals to one's *hridaya* or sense of right and justice.'

*Harijan*, 24-8-'34, p. 220, at p. 221

## INTER-DINING AND INTER-MARRIAGE

A correspondent asks:

"Are inter-dining and inter-marriage necessary for the removal of untouchability?"

My answer is, no and yes. 'No', because it is no part of the programme of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Generally, too, marrying and dining are matters of individual concern. No one has a right to ask another to choose a girl for wife or to dine with anybody against his will. But my answer is at the same time 'Yes', because if a person refuses to take food touched by another person on the ground of untouchability or inferiority, he is observing untouchability. In other



words, untouchability cannot constitute any ground for restraint on inter-dining or marriage.

*Harijan*, 23-3-'34, p. 44

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## INCONSISTENCIES ?

(Originally published in "Notes" under the above title)

A correspondent who is a diligent student of my writings finds it difficult to reconcile my recent writings about inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage and corresponding writings of some years ago.

He quotes from my article on "Hinduism" contributed to *Young India* of 6th October 1921. I give the quotation below with his omissions:

"Though, therefore, Varnashrama is not affected by inter-dining and inter-marriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage inter-dining and inter-marriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It is undoubtedly a religion of renunciation of the flesh, so that the spirit may be set free. . . .By restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint. . . .Prohibition against inter-marriage and inter-dining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul."

And then he quotes from my statement dated the 4th November last year, which was circulated to the Press. I give the quotation again with his omissions:

"Restriction on inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage is no part of Hindu religion. It is a social custom which crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline. . . .Today these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society, and emphasis on them has turned the attention of mass mind from the fundamentals which are vital to life's growth. . . .Dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society."

As I read them with a detached mind, I find no contradiction between the two statements, especially if they are read in their full context. In the statement of 1921, I wrote on Hinduism and gave the briefest outline of it. On the 4th of November I had to apply myself to the innumerable castes and caste restrictions. The mode of life in the Ashram in

1921 was absolutely the same as it is now. Therefore my practice has undergone no change. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon inter-dining and inter-marriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh. There is one word that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 today. Instead of "prohibition", I should repeat the expression used in the same article just a few lines before and say "self-imposed restriction against inter-marriage and inter-dining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul."

In spite of my statement of 4th November last, I would say that inter-dining and inter-marriage are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchability. At the same time, a super-imposed restriction would undoubtedly stunt the growth of any society, and to link these restrictions to Varnadharma or caste is undoubtedly prejudicial to the freedom of the spirit and would make Varna a drag upon religion. But having said this, I would like to say to this diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

*Harijan*, 29-4-'33, p. 2



## INTER-CASTE AND INTER-COMMUNAL MARRIAGES

(From "Gandhiji's Walking Tour Diary")

*Q.:* As you are an advocate of the abolition of caste, are we to take it that you favour inter-caste marriages? Many occupations are now the monopoly of specific castes. Should not this be abolished?

Gandhiji's reply: He was certainly in favour of inter-caste marriages. The question did not arise when all became casteless. When this happy event took place, monopoly of occupation would go.

*Q.:* You advocate inter-caste marriages. Do you also favour marriages between Indians professing different religions? Should they declare themselves as belonging to no denomination, or can they continue their old religious practices and yet inter-marry? If so, what form should the marriage ceremony take? Is it to be a purely civil function or a religious function?

Do you consider religion to be exclusively a personal matter?

Gandhiji's reply: Though he admitted that he had not always held the view, he had come to the conclusion long ago that an inter-religious marriage was a welcome event whenever it took place. His stipulation was that such connection was not a product of lust. In his opinion it was no marriage. It was illicit intercourse. Marriage in his estimation was a sacred institution. Hence there must be mutual friendship, either party having equal respect for the religion of the other. There was no question in this of conversion. Hence the marriage ceremony would be performed by the priests belonging to either faith. This happy event could take place when the communities shed mutual enmity and had regard for the religions of the world.

*Harijan*, 16-3-'47, p. 61 at p. 63

## INTER-COMMUNAL MARRIAGES

## I

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "Indira Nehru's Engagement")

I have received several angry and abusive letters and some professing to reason about Indira's engagement with Firoz Gandhi. Not a single correspondent has anything against Firoz Gandhi as a man. His only crime in their estimation is that he happens to be a Parsi. I have been, and I am still, as strong an opponent of either party changing religion for the sake of marriage. Religion is not a garment to be cast off at will. In the present case there is no question of change of religion. Firoz Gandhi has been for years an inmate of the Nehru family. He nursed Kamala Nehru in her sickness. He was like a son to her. During Indira's illness in Europe he was of great help to her. A natural intimacy grew up between them. The friendship has been perfectly honourable. It has ripened into mutual attraction. But neither party would think of marrying without the consent and blessing of Jawaharlal Nehru. This was given only after he was satisfied that the attraction had a solid basis. The public know my connection with the Nehrus. I had also talks with both the parties. It would have been cruelty to refuse consent to this engagement. As time advances such unions are bound to multiply with benefit to society. At present we have not even reached the stage of mutual toleration, but as toleration grows into mutual respect for religions such unions will be welcomed. No religion which is narrow and cannot satisfy the test of reason will survive the coming reconstruction of society in which the values will have changed and character, not possession of wealth, title or birth will be the sole test of merit. The Hinduism of my conception is no narrow creed. It is a grand evolutionary process as ancient as time, and embraces the teachings of Zoroaster, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Nanak



and other prophets that I could name. It is thus defined:

विद्वद्भिः सेवितः सद्भिर्नित्यमद्वेषरागिभिः ।

हृदयेनाभ्यनुज्ञातो यो धर्मस्तं निबोधत ॥

(Know that to be (true) religion which the wise and the good and those who are ever free from passion and hate follow and which appeals to the heart.)

If it is not that, it will perish. My correspondents will pardon me for not acknowledging their letters. I invite them to shed their wrath and bless the forthcoming marriage. Their letters betray ignorance, intolerance and prejudice, a species of untouchability, dangerous because not easily to be so classified.

*Harijan*, 8-3-'42, p. 65

## II

(Originally appeared in columns of "Question Box" under the caption "About Children")

*Q.*: I quite agree that as society advances marriages between the different communities will increase and should be welcomed. You rightly advocate no change of religion for the parties concerned. But what do you advocate for the children? In which religion should they be brought up, the father's or mother's?

*A.*: Presumption in such marriages is that the parents respect each other's religion. If they are religiously minded, the children will unconsciously imbibe what they think is best for them and choose their own faith without let or hindrance from the parents. If the latter are indifferent, the children will also be probably indifferent and label themselves anyhow. This is what I have observed in such marriages. The difficulty crops up when there is a serious difference arising between the parents as to the upbringing of the children.

*Harijan*, 29-3-'42, p. 94

## MARRIAGES BETWEEN HARIJANS AND NON-HARIJANS

A friend from Patidar Ashram, Surat, writes to Shri Narahari Parikh:

“In India the movement for removal of untouchability has received great impetus since Gandhiji’s entry into politics. If he can find an educated Harijan girl to marry a caste Hindu it will help the movement in a way. But the question should be considered from another aspect also. Our country is still backward in female education and amongst Harijans who are backward in every way, educated girls can be counted on the fingers of one’s hand. If they marry caste Hindus they will, as a rule, be cut off from their own society and absorbed by the caste Hindus. They will not be able to work for the uplift of their Harijan sisters from within. I know of one or two such instances.

“One might say that in a way such marriages help to keep the Harijans in ignorance. The progress of a community depends on the progress of its women. By giving away the best of their womanhood to the caste Hindus, Bapu will be closing the door on the Harijans getting out of the blackest ignorance in which they are today steeped. I think this should be stopped. If Harijan girls are to marry caste Hindus it should be on condition that the couple will devote their lives to the service of the Harijans. Otherwise educated Harijan girls should be encouraged to marry educated youths in their own community. If they are educated in the real sense of the term they will set an example to their community to emulate and follow.

“You must be knowing that in our Ashram, Harijan and non-Harijan students live together without any distinction whatsoever. Parikshitlal sends to us one or two Harijan students every year. This year we had two. One of them said to me: ‘Why does not Bapu encourage the marriages of educated caste Hindu girls with educated Harijan boys? This is what he should really encourage. If caste Hindu girls live amongst Harijans as Harijans, Harijan sisters will be able to learn a lot from them and Harijan uplift work will receive great impetus.’ I could answer the question



but I would rather that Bapu did so himself. It deserves serious thought."

If an educated Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu, the couple ought to devote themselves to the service of Harijans. Self-indulgence can never be the object of such a marriage. That will be improper. I can never encourage it. It is possible that a marriage entered into with the best of intentions turns out to be a failure. No one can prevent such mishaps. Even if one Harijan girl marries a caste Hindu with a high character it will do good to both the Harijans and caste Hindus. They will set up a good precedent and if the Harijan girl is really worthy, she will spread her fragrance far and wide and encourage others to copy her example. Society will cease to be scared by such marriages. They will see for themselves that there is nothing wrong in them. If children born of such a union turn out to be good, they will further help to remove untouchability. Every reform moves at the proverbial snail's pace. To be dissatisfied with this slowness of progress betrays ignorance of the way in which reform works.

It is certainly desirable that caste Hindu girls should select Harijan husbands. I hesitate to say that it is better. That would imply that women are inferior to men. I know that such inferiority complex is there today. For this reason I would agree that at present the marriage of a caste Hindu girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a caste Hindu. If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands. That it is most difficult I know from experience. Old prejudices are difficult to shed. One cannot afford to laugh at such prejudices either. They have to be overcome with patience. And if a girl imagines that her duty ends by marrying a Harijan and falls a prey to the temptation of self-indulgence after marriage, the last state would be worse than the first. The final test of every marriage is how far it develops the spirit of service in the parties. Every mixed marriage will tend in varying degrees to remove the stigma attached to such marriages. Finally there will be only one caste, known by the beautiful name Bhangi, that is to say,

the reformer or remover of all dirt. Let us all pray that such a happy day will dawn soon.

The correspondent must realize that even the best of my wishes cannot come true on the mere expression. I have not succeeded in marrying off a single Harijan girl to a caste Hindu so far after my declaration. I have a caste Hindu girl who at her father's wish has offered to marry a Harijan lad of her father's selection. The lad is at present under training at Sevagram. God willing, the marriage will take place after a short time.

*Harijan*, 7-7-'46, p. 212



## V. COW PROTECTION

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### THE MEANING OF COW PROTECTION

(From a letter dated 25-4-1925 written by Gandhiji from Tithal, to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru)

Cow protection to me is infinitely more than mere protection of the cow. The cow is merely a type for all that lives. Cow protection means protection of the weak, the helpless, the dumb and the deaf. Man becomes then not the lord and master of all creation but he is its servant. The cow to me is a sermon on pity.

*A Bunch of Old Letters*, by J. Nehru, p. 42

100

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF COW PROTECTION

(Originally appeared under the title "Cow Protection")

A correspondent writes:

"As most of the Hindus intuitively feel that the cow should be protected at all events, I too do so. I had witnessed the miserable sight of starving cows in their prime of life, being sold in lots, to Musalman hide merchants in the famine-stricken areas of the Ceded Districts.

"The Hindu scriptures alone seem to have enjoined cow protection on its followers. I have been trying to understand the philosophy of it. If the cow has to be protected purely from selfish motives, on account of its continuous utility from its birth till after its death, cow protection should have become universal and not confined to Hindus alone, for, mankind by instinct is selfish. If on the other hand, it has to be protected on account of its meek and harmless nature, there are other animals as the sheep and deer which also require human protection. What then is the special virtue in the cow, exclusively known or useful to the Hindu, over other domestic animals at any rate? If Hindus, not excluding the

vegetarian and orthodox sections, are entitled to kill buffaloes, goats, sheep etc., for purposes of food or sacrifice, what right have we to resent Musalmans killing the cow for sacrifice or food? Would not the appeal of the Hindus to the Musalmans to protect the cow be more reasonable and effective, if we Hindus ourselves give up animal killing for food or sacrifice?"

There is much to be said in favour of the argument adopted by the correspondent. But man does not govern himself by logic. He is a complex being; therefore a multiplicity of considerations act upon him and move him to do or refrain from doing things. Logically speaking, therefore, a Hindu who protects the cow should protect every animal. But taking all things into consideration, we may not cavil at his protecting the cow because he fails to protect the other animals. The only question therefore to consider is whether he is right in protecting the cow. And he cannot be wrong in so doing if non-killing of animals generally may be regarded as a duty for one who believes in Ahimsa. And every Hindu, and for that matter every man of religion, does so. The duty of not killing animals generally and therefore protecting them must be accepted as an indisputable fact. It is then so much to the credit of Hinduism that it has taken up cow protection as a duty. And he is a poor specimen of Hinduism who stops merely at cow protection when he can extend the arm of protection to other animals. The cow merely stands as a symbol, and protection of the cow is the least he is expected to undertake. But as I have shown already in my previous writings he is failing even in this elementary obligation.

The motive that actuates cow protection is not 'purely selfish', though selfish consideration undoubtedly enters into it. If it was purely selfish, the cow would be killed as in other countries after it had ceased to give full use. The Hindus will not kill the cow even though she may be a heavy burden. The numberless Goshalas that have been established by charitably-minded people for tending disabled and useless cows is in a way an eloquent testimony of the effort that is being made in the direction. Though they are today very poor institutions for the object to be achieved



the fact does not detract from the value of the motive behind the act.

The philosophy of cow protection therefore, is, in my opinion, sublime. It immediately puts the animal creation on the same level with man so far as the right to live is concerned. But it is no part of Hinduism to prevent by force cow slaughter by those who do not believe in cow protection. Hindus will bring the Musalmans and the rest of the world to their way of thinking, only by living the religion of Ahimsa as fully as it is humanly possible. They must rely upon the working of the great principle in their own lives and making its effective appeal to the outer world. They will not convert the latter by force of arm. They certainly can by force of Ahimsa. We little realize the matchless potency of Ahimsa when it is thoroughly put in active operation.

*Young India*, 11-11-'26, p. 391

## 101

### THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT OF COW PROTECTION

(From "Cow Protection")

So far I have confined myself to the grosser or material aspect of cow protection, i.e. the aspect that refers to the animal cow only. In its finer or spiritual sense the term cow protection means the protection of every living creature. Today the world does not fully realize the force and possibilities that lie hidden in Ahimsa.

The scriptures of Christians, Musalmans and Hindus are all replete with the teaching of Ahimsa. But we do not know its full import. The Rishis of old performed terrible penances and austerities to discover the right meaning of sacred texts. Today we have at least two interpretations of the Gayatri. Which one of them is correct, that of the Sanatanists or that of the Arya Samajists? Who can say? But our Rishis made the startling discovery (and every day I feel more and more convinced of its truth) that sacred texts and inspired writings yield their truth only in proportion as one had advanced in the practice of Ahimsa and truth.

The greater the realization of truth and Ahimsa the greater the illumination. These same Rishis declared that cow protection was the supreme duty of a Hindu and that its performance brought one *Moksha*, i.e. salvation. Now I am not ready to believe that merely protecting the animal cow, one can attain *Moksha*. For *Moksha* one must completely get rid of one's lower feelings like attachment, hatred, anger, jealousy etc. It follows, therefore, that the meaning of cow protection in terms of *Moksha* must be much wider and far more comprehensive than is commonly supposed. The cow protection which can bring one *Moksha* must, from its very nature, include the protection of everything that feels. Therefore in my opinion, every little breach of the Ahimsa principle, like causing hurt by harsh speech to any one, man, woman or child, to cause pain to the weakest and the most insignificant creature on earth would be a breach of the principle of cow protection, would be tantamount to the sin of beef-eating—differing from it in degree if at all, rather than in kind. That being so, I hold that with all our passions let loose, we cannot today claim to be following the principle of cow protection.

*Young India*, 29-1-'25, p. 37 at p. 39

## 102

### THE COW AND WORSHIP OF GOD

(From "The Implications of Non-violence" by M. D.)

When I see a cow I do not see an animal to be eaten. It is for me a poem of pity. I worship it and I shall defend its worship against the whole world. God there is only one; but He enables me to see Him and worship Him in stone, in an Englishman, in a traitor if you will. For I shall not hate even a traitor. My religion takes me to that length.

*Young India*, 1-1-'25, p. 7 at p. 8



## COW PROTECTION SOCIETY

(From "Cow Protection")

Religion without the backing of reason and enlightenment is a worthless sentiment which is bound to die of inanition. It is knowledge that ultimately gives salvation. Devotion to the cow divorced from knowledge is the surest way of imposing premature death on her. Therefore one man with an accurate knowledge of the cattle problem, if he has the heart for the cow, represents in his own person all the cow protection societies that were and will be ever formed.

*Young India*, 7-5-'25, p. 160

## LIMITS OF SACREDNESS OF SUB-HUMAN LIFE

(Originally appeared under the title "Religion v. No Religion")

A correspondent writes:

"In the *Harijanbandhu* of the 5th May you have written that your non-violence contemplates destruction of animals dangerous to mankind, such as leopards, wolves, snakes, scorpions etc.

"You do not believe in giving food to dogs etc. Several other people besides the Gujaratis look upon the feeding of dogs as a meritorious act. Such a belief may not be justifiable in times of food shortage like the present. Yet we must remember that these animals can be very useful to man. One can feed them and take work out of them.

"You had put 27 questions to Shri Raichandbhai from Durban. One of these questions was: 'What should a seeker do when a snake attacks him?' His answer was: 'He should not kill the snake and, if it bites he should let it do so.' How is it that you speak differently now?" "

I have written a lot on this subject in the past. At that time the topic was the killing of rabid dogs. There was much

discussion on the subject but all that seems to have been forgotten.

My non-violence is not merely kindness to all living creatures. The emphasis laid on the sacredness of sub-human life in Jainism is understandable. But that can never mean that one is to be kind to this life in preference to human life. While writing about the sacredness of such life, I take it that the sacredness of human life had been taken for granted. The former has been overemphasized. And, while putting it into practice, the idea has undergone distortion. For instance, there are many who derive complete satisfaction in feeding ants. It would appear that the theory has become a wooden, lifeless dogma. Hypocrisy and distortion are passing current under the name of religion.

Ahimsa is the highest ideal. It is meant for the brave; never for the cowardly. To benefit by other's killing and delude oneself into the belief that one is being very religious and non-violent, is sheer self-deception.

A so-called votary of non-violence will not stay in a village which is visited by a leopard every day. He will run away and, when someone has killed the leopard, will return to take charge of the hearth and home. This is not non-violence. This is a coward's violence. The man who has killed the leopard has at least given proof of some bravery. The man who takes advantage of the killing is a coward. He can never expect to know true non-violence.

In life it is impossible to eschew violence completely. The question arises, where is one to draw the line? The line cannot be the same for everyone. Although essentially the principle is the same, yet everyone applies it in his or her own way. What is one man's food can be another man's poison. Meat-eating is a sin for me. Yet, for another person, who has always lived on meat and never seen anything wrong, to give it up simply in order to copy me will be a sin.

If I wish to be an agriculturist and stay in the jungle, I will have to use the minimum unavoidable violence in order to protect my fields. I will have to kill monkeys, birds and insects which eat up my crops. If I do not wish to do so myself, I will have to engage someone to do it for me. There is not much difference between the two. To allow crops to be eaten



up by animals in the name of Ahimsa while there is a famine in the land is certainly a sin. Evil and good are relative terms. What is good under certain conditions can become an evil or a sin under a different set of conditions.

Man is not to drown himself in the well of Shastras but he is to dive in their broad ocean and bring out pearls. At every step he has to use his discrimination as to what is Ahimsa and what is Himsa. In this there is no room for shame or cowardice. The poet has said that the road leading up to God is for the brave, never for the cowardly.

Finally, Raichandbhai's advice to me was that if I had courage, if I wanted to see God face to face I should let myself be bitten by a snake instead of killing it. I have never killed a snake before or after receiving that letter. That is no matter of credit for me. My ideal is to be able to play with snakes and scorpions fearlessly. But it is merely a wish so far. Whether and when it will be realized I do not know. Everywhere I have let my people kill both. I could have prevented them if I had wished. But how could I? I did not have the courage to take them up with my own hands and teach my companions a lesson in fearlessness. I am ashamed that I could not do so. But my shame could not benefit them or me.

If Ramanama favours me I might still attain that courage some day. In the meantime, I consider it my duty to act as I have stated above. Religion is a thing to be lived. It is not mere sophistry.

*Harijan*, 9-6-'46, p. 172

## VI. THE BHAGAVADGITA

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### GITA—THE MOTHER

Being asked during his recent visit to Banaras, by Acharya Anandshankar Dhruva to address a few words to students of the Kashi Vishvavidyalaya, on the Gita, Gandhiji in the course of a Hindi speech said:

“I have been asked by Acharya Anandshankar Dhruva to say a few words on the Gita to the students of the Kashi Vishvavidyalaya. It is not without hesitation that I have accepted the invitation. What right can a layman like myself have to discourse on a theme like this in the presence of a savant like him? I have neither his profound scholarship, nor the deep study of our ancient religious lore which Pandit Malaviyaji, for instance, has. Sardar Vallabhbhai, in his characteristic manner, asked me this morning whether scavengers, cultivators, and weavers like him and me were not altogether out of court in a city of pandits like Kashi and in the presence of such learned pandits as Malaviyaji and Acharya Dhruva, and in a way he was right. But I have come here, not with any pretence to learning, but only to tell you what reaction the Gita had on lay natures like mine and the Sardar's. I wonder whether you have even a distant idea of how profoundly it affected the Sardar during his imprisonment. I am here to bear witness to the fact that in the Yeravda prison it gave him more strength and sustenance than meat and drink. To read the Gita in the original he set about learning Sanskrit with the help of Pandit Satavalekar's Sanskrit self-instructor, and once he had started on it, the book seldom left his hands. It occupied him from morning till night. It was not an obsession of an unoccupied mind, as you might be tempted to think, but the result of deep thought. ‘Which is the one book that can be to the Hindus what the Bible is to the Christians or the Koran to the Musalmans?’ we asked ourselves. Is it the Vedas?

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No. The Bhagavat? No. Devipuran? No. Early in my childhood I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve me as an unfailing guide through the trials and temptations of life. The Vedas could not supply that need, if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi, for which I was not ready then. But the Gita, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the Shastras and the Upanishads. That decided me. I learnt Sanskrit to enable me to read the Gita. Today the Gita is not only my Bible or my Koran; it is more than that—it is my mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago; but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom. Often in the course of my struggle against untouchability, I am confronted with conflicting opinions delivered by doctors of learning. Some of them tell me that untouchability as it is practised today has no sanction in Hinduism and they bless my efforts to eradicate it; but there are some other who maintain that untouchability has been an essential part of Hinduism from the very beginning. Which authority should I follow under the circumstances? I feel absolutely at sea. The Vedas and the Smritis are of no avail to me. I then approach the Mother and say, ‘Mother, these learned pandits have put me in a predicament. Help me out of my perplexity.’ And the Mother, with a smile, says in reply: ‘The assurance held out by me in the ninth chapter is not meant for the Brahmanas only, but for the sinner and the outcaste, the downtrodden and the disinherited, too.’ But in order to be worthy of that promise, we must be obedient and devoted children of the Mother and not disobedient and disloyal children, who only make a pretence of devotion.

It is sometimes alleged against the Gita that it is too difficult a work for the man in the street. The criticism, I venture to submit, is ill-founded. The Gita enabled the late Lokamanya, out of his encyclopaedic learning and study, to produce a monumental commentary. For him it was a storehouse of profound truths to exercise his

intellect upon. But that need not scare away a lay reader. If you find all the eighteen chapters too difficult to negotiate, make a careful study of the first three chapters only. They will give you in a nutshell what is propounded in greater detail and from different angles in the remaining fifteen chapters. Even these three chapters can be further epitomized in a few verses that can be selected from these chapters. Add to this the fact that at three distinct places the Gita goes even further and exhorts to us to leave alone all 'isms' and take refuge in the Lord alone, and it will be seen how baseless is the charge that the message of the Gita is too subtle or complicated for lay minds to understand. The Gita is the universal Mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to any one who knocks. A true votary of the Gita does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to the sceptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed.

Our students are prone to be upset by rifles. A trivial thing like failure in an examination plunges them into the darkest despair. The Gita inculcates upon them the duty of perseverance in the face of seeming failure. It teaches us that we have a right to actions only but not to the fruit thereof and that success and failure are one and the same thing at bottom. It calls upon us to dedicate ourselves, body, mind and soul, to pure duty, and not to become mental voluptuaries at the mercy of all chance desires and undisciplined impulses. As a Satyagrahi, I can declare that the Gita is ever presenting me with fresh lessons. If somebody tells me that this is my delusion, my reply to him would be that I shall hug this delusion as my richest treasure.

I would advise the students to begin their day with an early morning recitation of the Gita. I am a lover and devotee of Tulasidas. I adore the great-spirit that gave to an aching world the all-healing *mantra* of Ramanama. But I am here today not to present Tulasidas to you, but to ask you



to take up the study of the Gita, not in a carping or critical spirit, but in a devout and reverent spirit. Thus approached, she will grant your every wish. It is no joke, I admit, remembering by heart all the eighteen chapters, but it is worthwhile to make the attempt. Once you have tasted of its sweet nectar, your attachment to it will grow from day to day. The recitation of the Gita verses will support you in your trials and console you in your distress, even in the darkness of solitary confinement. And, if with these verses on your lips you receive the final summons and deliver up your spirit, you will attain Brahma-Nirvan—the final Liberation. What that blessed state is — I leave it for your learned Acharyas to explain to you.”

*Harijan*, 24-8-'34, p. 221

## 106

## THE SECRET OF GITA

(Originally appeared under the title “Gita Jayanti”)

Thus writes Shri G. V. Ketkar of *Kesari*, Poona :

“This year Gita Jayanti is on 22nd December, Friday. I repeat the request, which I have been making for some years, that you should write about the Gita and Gita Jayanti in *Harijan*. I also repeat another which was made last year. In one of your speeches on the Gita, you have said that for those who have no time to go through the whole of the Gita (700 verses) it is sufficient to read the second and third chapters. You have also said that these two chapters can be further epitomized. If possible you should explain why you regard the second and third chapters as fundamental. I have tried to place the same idea before the public by publishing the verses of the second and third chapters as *Gita Bija* or the essence of the Gita. Your writing on the subject will naturally be more effective.”

I have hitherto resisted Shri Ketkar's request. I do not know that these Jayantis serve the purpose for which they are intended. Spiritual matters do not admit of the ordinary method of advertisement. The best advertisement of things spiritual is corresponding action. I believe that all

spiritual compositions owe their effect, first to their being a faithful record of the experiences of their authors, and secondly because of the life lived by the devotees, as far as possible, in accordance with their teachings. Thus the composers breathe life into their compositions, and the votaries nurse them into robustness by living them. That, to my mind, is the secret of the hold of the Gita, Tulasidas's Ramayana and such other works on the millions. In yielding to Shri Ketkar's pressure, therefore, I entertain the hope that those who take part in the forthcoming celebration will approach it in the proper spirit and with a fixed intention to live up to the message of the noble song. I have endeavoured to show that its message consists in the performance of one's duty with detachment. The theme of the Gita is contained in the second chapter, and the way to carry out the message is to be found in the third chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed, every one of them has a merit of its own. The Gita has been called (*Gitai*) गीताई by Vinoba who has translated it verse for verse in very simple yet stately Marathi. The metre corresponds with that of the original. To thousands it is *the* real mother, for it yields the rich milk of consolation in difficulties. I have called it my spiritual dictionary, for it has never failed me in distress. It is moreover a book which is free from sectarianism and dogma. Its appeal is universal. I do not regard the Gita as an abstruse book. No doubt learned men can see abstruseness in everything they come across. But in my opinion a man with ordinary intelligence should find no difficulty in gathering the simple message of the Gita. Its Sanskrit is incredibly simple. I have read many English translations, but there is nothing to equal Edwin Arnold's metrical translation which he has beautifully and aptly called *The Song Celestial*.

*Harijan*, 16-12-'39, p. 382



## THE MESSAGE OF GITA

[It was at Kosani in Almora, that on 24th June 1929, i.e. after two years' waiting, that I finished the introduction in Gujarati to my translation of the Gita. The whole was then published in due course. It has been translated in Hindi, Bengali and Marathi. There has been an insistent demand for an English translation. I finished the translation of the introduction at the Yeravda prison. Since my discharge it has lain with friends, and now I give it to the reader. Those, who take no interest in the book of life, will forgive the trespass on these columns. To those who are interested in the poem and treat it as their guide, my humble attempt might prove of some help.—M.K.G.]

## I

Just as, acted upon by the affection of co-workers like Swami Anand and others, I wrote my *Experiments with Truth*, so has it been regarding my rendering of the Gita. "We shall be able to appreciate your meaning of the message of the Gita, only when we are able to study a translation of the whole text by yourself, with the addition of such notes as you may deem necessary. I do not think it is just on your part to deduce Ahimsa etc. from stray verses", thus spoke Swami Anand to me during the non-co-operation days. I felt the force of his remarks. I therefore told him that I would adopt his suggestion when I got the time. Shortly afterwards I was imprisoned. During my incarceration I was able to study the Gita more fully. I went reverently through the Gujarati translation of the Lokamanya's great work. He had kindly presented me with the Marathi original and the translations in Gujarati and Hindi, and had asked me, if I could not tackle the original, at least to go through the Gujarati translation. I had not been able to follow the advice outside the prison walls. But when I was imprisoned I read the Gujarati translation. This reading whetted my appetite for more and I glanced through several works on the Gita.

2. My first acquaintance with the Gita began in 1888-89 with the verse translation by Sir Edwin Arnold known as *The Song Celestial*. On reading it I felt a keen desire to read a Gujarati translation. And I read as many translations as I could lay hold of. But all such reading can give me no passport for presenting my own translation. Then again my knowledge of Sanskrit is limited; my knowledge of Gujarati too is in no way scholarly. How could I then dare present the public with my translation?

3. It has been my endeavour as also that of some companions to reduce to practice the teaching of the Gita as I have understood it. The Gita has become for us a spiritual reference book. I am aware that we ever fail to act in perfect accord with the teaching. The failure is not due to want of effort, but is in spite of it. Even through the failures we seem to see rays of hope. The accompanying rendering contains the meaning of the Gita message which this little band is trying to enforce in its daily conduct.

4. Again this rendering is designed for women, the commercial class, the so-called Shudras and the like, who have little or no literacy equipment, who have neither the time nor the desire to read the Gita in the original, and yet who stand in need of its support. In spite of my Gujarati being unscholarly, I must own to having the desire to leave to the Gujaratis, through the mother tongue, whatever knowledge I may possess. I do indeed wish, that at a time when literacy output of a questionable character is pouring in upon the Gujaratis, they should have before them a rendering the majority can understand of a book that is regarded as unrivalled for its spiritual merit and so withstand the overwhelming flood of unclean literature.

5. This desire does not mean any disrespect to the other renderings. They have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their meaning of the Gita in their own lives. At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavour to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of 40 years. For this reason I do indeed harbour the wish that all Gujarati men or women, wishing to shape their



conduct according to their faith, should digest and derive strength from the translation here presented.

6. My co-workers, too, have worked at this translation. My knowledge of Sanskrit being very limited I should not have full confidence in my literal translation. To that extent therefore the translation has passed before the eyes of Vinoba, Kaka Kalelkar, Mahadev Desai and Kishorlal Mashruwala.

## II

7. Now about the message of the Gita.

8. Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the Gita, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the Gita. A study of the Mahabharata gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the Mahabharata as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyas made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the Mahabharata has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.

9. The author of the Mahabharata has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.

10. In this great work the Gita is the crown. Its second chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the Gita, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

11. Krishna of the Gita is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.

12. In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to truth. There is an Urdu saying which means, "Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine." And therefore he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought, that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism the status of the most perfect incarnation.

13. This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the Gita, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the Gita appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization. That, which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the Gita even at the risk of repetition.

14. *That matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of action.*

15. This is the centre round which the Gita is woven. This renunciation is the central sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain



freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words how can one be free from action, i.e. from the taint of sin? The Gita has answered the question in decisive language: "By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e. by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul."

16. But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the Vedas from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the Gita has insisted on devotion accompanying it and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the Gita, "Have devotion, and knowledge will follow." This devotion is not mere lip worship, it is a wrestling with death. Hence the Gita's assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.

17. Thus the devotion required by the Gita is no soft-hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the Gita had the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead marks, make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion. He is the devotee who is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

18. We thus see, that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of exchange. They are themselves the thing we want. In other words if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the Gita is perfect peace.

19. But such knowledge and devotion, to be true, have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions a mere learned man will pass as a pandit. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota*. Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting a *lota*.

20. Or take Bhakti. The popular notion of Bhakti is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads etc. might be interrupted. This Bhakta therefore leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

21. But the Gita says: 'No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large to engage in action?'

22. While on the one hand it is beyond dispute that all action binds, on the other hand it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work whether they will or no. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is included in the term action. Then how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he may be acting? The manner in which the Gita has solved the problem, is to my knowledge, unique. The Gita says: "Do your allotted work but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward and work."

This is the unmistakable teaching of the Gita. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference



to result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto, and the capacity for it. He, who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result, and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.

23. Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The Gita reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means absence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, he who renounces reaps a thousandfold. The renunciation of the Gita is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says goodbye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he therefore resorts to means fair and foul to attain his end.

24. From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit the author of the Gita discovered the path of renunciation of fruit, and put it before the world in a most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good. "One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religion in such pursuits; religion is only for attainment of salvation," we hear many worldly-wise people say. In my opinion the author of the Gita has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and worldly pursuits. On the contrary he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the Gita teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the Gita, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

25. Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow truth and Ahimsa. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or Himsa. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the Gita was not written to establish Ahimsa. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the Gita age. The Gita had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out as early as the 2nd chapter.

26. But if the Gita believed in Ahimsa or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a warlike illustration? When the Gita was written, although people believed in Ahimsa, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and Ahimsa.

27. In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the Gita as to his limitations of Ahimsa and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the Gita. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible that in the age prior to that of the Gita, offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the Gita sense. In the Gita continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice but never animal sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning



of the word Sannyasa undergone, in the Gita, a transformation. The Sannyasa of the Gita will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The Sannyasa of the Gita is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the Gita by extending meanings of words has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the Gita it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of Ahimsa in every shape and form.

28. The Gita is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.

29. Nor is the Gita a collection of Do's and Don't's. What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time, or in one place, may not be so at another time, and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.

30. The Gita has sung the praises of knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect; it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore the Gita is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say:

"Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will by the fact of this service assuredly reach Me. And those who being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death."

*Young India*, 6-8-'31, p. 205

## THE TEACHING OF GITA

Referring to my recent articles on the English peace movement led by Canon Sheppard, a friend writes:

“I hold the view that independently of the context of the Gita and the preliminary conversation between Arjuna and Shri Krishna, Hinduism does not stand decisively for non-violence in regard to organized invasion. It would be straining too much to interpret all our best scriptures in this way. Hinduism no doubt holds the spirit of compassion and love as the very highest duty for man. But it does not preach what you or the pacifists preach, and it is no good straining everything into an allegory for this object.”

I have admitted in my introduction to the Gita known as *Anasakti Yoga* that it is not a treatise on non-violence nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism as it is practised today, or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the Gita and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the Koran or the Bible. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The Gita itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to Karma, Sannyasa, Yajna, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the Gita has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the Gita put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism, as interpreted in the Gita to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers.



At one time they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the Gita is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. Any way I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the Gita to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions were an outcome of a study of the Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, etc.

*Harijan*, 3-10-'36, p. 265

## ADHIKARA FOR READING GITA!

(Originally appeared under the title "Distortion of Truth")

A correspondent has been endeavouring with the help of the headmaster of a high school to introduce the teaching of the Gita among its boys. But at a recent meeting convened to organize Gita readings a bank manager got up and disturbed the even tenor of the proceedings by saying that students had not the *adhikara* (qualification) for studying the Gita; it was not a plaything to be placed before students. The correspondent sends me a long and argued letter about the incident and sends in support of his contention some apt sayings from Ramakrishna Paramahansa from which I cull the following:

"Boys and youths should be encouraged to seek God. They are like unpecked fruits, being totally untainted by worldly desires.

Once such desires have entered their minds, it is very difficult to make them tread the path to salvation.

“Why do I love young men so much? Because they are masters of the whole (16 annas) of their minds, which get divided and sub-divided as they grow up. One-half of the mind of a married man goes to his wife. When a child is born it takes away one-fourth (4 annas), and the remaining one-fourth (4 annas) is scattered over parents, worldly honours, dress etc. Therefore a young mind can easily know God. It is very difficult for old people to do so.

“The parrot cannot be taught to sing if the membrane of its throat becomes hardened with age. It must be taught while it is young. Similarly, in old age it is difficult for the mind to be fixed on God. It can be easily done so in youth.

“If a *seer* of adulterated milk contains a *chhatank* (sixteenth part of a *seer*) of water, it can be thickened into *kshira* (condensed milk) with very little labour and consumption of fuel. But should there be three *paos* ( $\frac{3}{4}$  *seer*) of water in a *seer*, the milk cannot be easily thickened and a large consumption of fuel will be required. A young mind, being but slightly adulterated with worldly desires can be easily turned towards God; this cannot be done with the minds of old people which are highly adulterated with such desires.

“The tender bamboo can be easily bent, but the full-grown bamboo breaks when an attempt is made to bend it. It is easy to bend young hearts towards God, but the heart of the old escapes the hold when so drawn.

“The human mind is like a package of mustard seed. As it is very difficult to gather the seeds that escape out of a torn package and are scattered in all directions, so when the human mind runs in diverse directions and is occupied with many worldly things, it is not a very easy task to collect and concentrate it. The mind of a youth not running in diverse directions, can be easily fixed on anything; but the mind of an old man being totally occupied with worldly things, it is very hard for him to draw it away from them and fix it on God.”

I had heard of *adhikara* in connection with the Vedas, but I never knew that the Gita required the qualifications that the bank manager had in mind. It would have been better if he had stated the nature of the qualifications he required. The Gita clearly states that it is meant for all but scoffers. If Hindu students may not read the Gita they



may not read any religious works at all. Indeed the original conception in Hinduism is that the student life is the life of a *brahmachari* who should begin it with a knowledge of religion coupled with practice so that he may digest what he learns and weave religious conduct into his life. The student of old began to live his religion before he knew what it was, and this conduct was followed by due enlightenment, so that he might know the reason for the conduct prescribed for him.

*Adhikara* then there certainly was. But it was the *adhikara* of right conduct known as five *yamas* or cardinal restraints, *ahimsa* (innocence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *brahmacharya* (celibacy). These were the rules that had to be observed by anybody who wished to study religion. He may not go to religious books for proving the necessity of these fundamentals of religion.

But today the word *adhikara* like many such potent words has suffered distortion, and a dissolute man, simply because he is called a Brahmana, has *adhikara* to read and expound Shastras to us, whereas a man, if he is labelled an untouchable because of his birth in a particular state, no matter how virtuous he may be, may not read them.

But the author of the Mahabharata of which the Gita is a part wrote his great work for the purpose of meeting this insane objection, and made it accessible to all irrespective of the so-called caste, provided, I presume, that he complied with the observances I have described. I add the qualifying expression 'I presume' for at the time of writing I do not recall the observance of the *yamas* as a condition precedent to a person studying the Mahabharata. Experience however shows that the purity of heart and the devotional frame of mind are necessary for a proper understanding of religious books.

The printing age has broken down all barriers and scoffers read religious books with the same freedom (if not greater) than the religiously minded have. But we are here discussing propriety of students reading the Gita as part of religious instruction and devotional exercise. Here I cannot imagine any class of persons more amenable

to the restraints and thus more fitted than students for such instruction. Unfortunately it is to be admitted that neither the students nor the instructors in the majority of cases think anything of the real *adhikara* of the five restraints.

*Young India*, 8-12-'27, p. 408

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## HINDU STUDENTS AND GITA

## I

The other day, in the course of a conversation, a missionary friend asked me, if India was really a spiritually advanced country, why it was that he found only a few students having any knowledge of their own religion, even of the Bhagavadgita. In support of the statement, the friend who is himself an educationist told me, that he had made it a point to ask the students he met whether they had any knowledge of their religion or of the Bhagavadgita. A vast majority of them were found to be innocent of any such knowledge.

I do not propose to take up at the present moment the inference, that because certain students had no knowledge of their own religion, India was not a spiritually advanced country, beyond saying that the ignorance on the part of the students of religious books did not necessarily mean absence of all religious life or want of spirituality among the people to which the students belonged. But there is no doubt, that the vast majority of students who pass through the Government educational institutions are devoid of any religious instruction. The remark of the missionary had reference to the Mysore students, and I was somewhat pained to observe that even the students of Mysore had no religious instruction in the State schools. I know that there is a school of thought which believes in only secular instruction being given in public schools. I know also that in a country like India, where there are most religions of the world represented and where there are so many denominations in the same religion, there



must be a difficulty about making provision for religious instruction. But if India is not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instruction of its youth must be held to be at least as necessary as secular instruction. It is true, that knowledge of religious books is no equivalent of that of religion. But if we cannot have religion we must be satisfied with providing our boys and girls with what is next best. And whether there is such instruction given in the schools or not, grown up students must cultivate the art of self-help about matters religious as about others. They may start their own class just as they have their debating and now spinners' clubs.

Addressing the Collegiate High School students at Simoga, I found upon enquiry at the meeting that out of a hundred or more Hindu boys, there were hardly eight who had read the Bhagavadgita. None raised his hand in answer to the question, whether of the few who had read the Gita there was any who understood it. Out of five or six Musalman boys all raised their hands as having read the Koran. But only one could say that he knew its meaning. The Gita is, in my opinion, a very easy book to understand. It does present some fundamental problems which are no doubt difficult of solution. But the general trend of the Gita is in my opinion unmistakable. It is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass it gives a complete reasoned moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal. The language is incredibly simple. But I nevertheless think that there should be an authoritative version in each vernacular, and the translations should be so prepared as to avoid technicalities and in a manner that would make the teaching of the Gita intelligible to the average man. The suggestion is not intended in any way to supplement the original. For I reiterate my opinion that every Hindu boy and girl should know Sanskrit. But for a long time to come, there will be millions without any knowledge of Sanskrit. It would be suicidal to keep them deprived of the teachings of the Bhagavadgita because they do not know Sanskrit.

*Young India*, 25-8-'27, p. 272

## II

(From the address to the Mannargudi students)

“You state in your address that you read the Gospels daily even as I do. I cannot say that I read the Gospels daily but I can say that I have read the Gospels in a humble and prayerful spirit, and it is well with you if you are also reading the Gospels in that spirit. But I expect that the vast majority of you are Hindu boys. I wish that you could have said to me that at least your Hindu boys were reading the Bhagavadgita daily to derive inspiration. For I believe that all the great religions of the world are true more or less. I say ‘more or less’ because I believe that everything that the human hand touches by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I therefore admit, in all humility, that even the Vedas, the Koran and the Bible are the imperfect word of God, and imperfect being that we are, swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fulness, and so I say to a Hindu boy, that he must not uproot the traditions in which he has been brought up, as I say to a Musalman or a Christian boy that he must not uproot his traditions. And so whilst I would welcome your learning the Gospel and your learning the Koran, I would certainly insist on all of you Hindu boys, if I had the power of insistence, learning the Gita. It is my belief that the impurity that we see about boys in schools, the carelessness about things that matter in life, the levity with which the student world deals with the greatest and most fundamental questions of life is due to this uprooting of tradition from which boys have hitherto derived their sustenance.

“But I must not be misunderstood. I do not hold that everything ancient is good because it is ancient. I do not advocate surrender of God-given reasoning faculty in the



face of ancient tradition. Any tradition, however ancient if inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land. Untouchability may be considered to be an ancient tradition, the institution of child widowhood and child marriage may be considered to be ancient tradition, and even so many an ancient horrible belief and superstitious practice. I would sweep them out of existence if I had the power. When, therefore, I talk of respecting the ancient tradition, you now understand what I mean, and it is because I see the same God in the Bhagavadgita as I see in the Bible and the Koran that I say to the Hindu boys that they will derive greater inspiration from the Bhagavadgita because they will be tuned to the Gita more than any other book."

*Young India*, 22-9-'27, p. 317 at p. 319

## 111

### DISCOURSES ON GITA

(The following are a series of letters written to Sabarmati Ashram inmates by Gandhiji during his incarceration in Yeravda Prison following the historic Dandi March in 1930. They have been translated into English from Gujarati by Mr. Valji G. Desai.)

#### Chapter I

When the Pandavas and the Kauravas gathered together on the battle-field of Kurukshetra (the field of Kuru) with their armies, Duryodhana the king of Kauravas, approached Drona (his teacher in the science of war) and named the leading warriors on either side. As a signal for the battle to begin, conch-shell horns were sounded on both sides and Shri Krishna who was Arjuna's charioteer drove his chariot into a place between the two armies. The scene which greeted Arjuna's eyes unnerved him, and he said to Shri Krishna, 'How can I attack these in battle? I might fight readily enough if I had to fight with strangers, but these are my kinsmen. The Kauravas and the Pandavas are first cousins. We were brought up together. Drona is our teacher as well as of the Kauravas'.

Bhishma is a revered elder for both. How can I fight with him? It is true that the Kauravas are criminals and doers of evil deeds. They have wronged the Pandavas and deprived them of their lands. They have insulted the saintly Draupadi. But what shall I gain by killing them? They are fools indeed. But shall I also be equally foolish? I have some little knowledge. I can discriminate between right and wrong. I thus see that it is a sin to fight with relatives. Never mind if they have taken wrongful possession of the Pandavas' share in the kingdom. Never mind even if they kill us. But how dare we raise our hand against them? O Krishna, I will not fight with my kith and kin.'

With these words, Arjuna sank down on the seat of the chariot, being overwhelmed by grief.

Here ends the first Chapter which is entitled 'the sorrow of Arjuna'. All of us should feel pain even as Arjuna did. No acquisition of knowledge is possible unless there is in us a sense of something lacking and a desire to know the truth. If a man is not curious even to know what is wrong and what is right, what is the use of religion for him? The battle-field of Kurukshetra only provides the occasion for the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna. The real Kurukshetra is the human heart, which is also a *dharmakshetra* (the field of righteousness) if we look upon it as the abode of God and invite Him to take hold of it. Some battle or other is fought on this battle-field from day to day. Most of these battles arise from the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine', between kinsmen and strangers. Therefore, as we shall find later on, the Lord tells Arjuna that attraction (*raga*) and repulsion (*dvesha*) lie at the root of sin. When I look upon a person or thing as 'mine', *raga* takes hold of my mind; and when I look upon him as a stranger, aversion or hatred enters the mind. Therefore we must forget the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine'. That is to say, we must give up our likes and dislikes. This is the teaching of the Gita and all other scriptures. To say this is one thing; to practise it is quite another. The Gita is there to teach us how to practise it. We will try to understand the method it recommends.



## Chapter II

When Arjuna had picked himself a little bit, the Lord rebuked him and said, 'How is it that this delusion has come to you? It is unworthy of a warrior like you.' But even then Arjuna stuck to his first position, refused to fight and said, 'If in order to get it, I have to slay elders and other relations, I do not want not only a kingdom on this earth but even the delights of paradise. My mind gropes in darkness. I do not know where my duty lies. I put myself into your hands. Please guide me.'

Finding that Arjuna was bewildered and aspired after knowledge, Krishna had pity on him and proceeded to explain things to him: 'Your sorrow is for nothing, and you utter words about wisdom without understanding. You have evidently forgotten the distinction between the body and the embodied soul. The soul never dies; but the body passes through childhood, youth and age and perishes in the end. The body is born but the soul is birthless and unchanging. It ever was, is now and will be there for all time to come. For whom then do you grieve? Your grief arises from a delusion. You look upon these Kauravas as your own, but you are aware that their bodies will come to an end. And as for the souls which inhabit these bodies, no one can destroy them. The soul cannot be wounded by weapons, burned by fire, dried by the wind or drowned in water. Then again, consider this from the standpoint of your duty as a warrior with an army under his command. If you refuse to fight this righteous war, the consequences will be the very reverse of what you expect and you will become an object of ridicule. You have always enjoyed the reputation of being a brave man. But if now you withdraw from the battle, you will be supposed to have been driven from it by fear. If it were part of your duty to flee in the face of danger, disgrace would not matter, but if you retire from battle now, you will have failed to discharge your duty, and people will be justified in condemning your flight.'

'Thus far, I have tried to reason out things, draw a distinction between the body and the soul and remind

you of your duty as a warrior. But let me now explain Karmayoga (the method of action). A practitioner of Karmayoga never comes to harm. It has nothing to do with chopping logic. It is something to be translated into action and experience. An ounce of practice is more profitable than tons of argumentation. And this practice too must not be vitiated by speculation about its fruit. Literalists perform Vedic rites directed to the acquisition of material rewards. If one rite does not yield the expected fruit, they have recourse to another, and being disappointed once more, they take up a third. And thus they suffer from utter mental confusion. As a matter of fact, it is up to us to do our duty without wasting a single thought on the fruits of our action. To fight is the duty you have to discharge at present. Gain or loss, defeat or victory, is not in your power. Why should you carry the needless burden of thinking about them and be like the dog who walks under a cart and imagines that it is being drawn by himself and not by the bullocks? Defeat and victory, heat and cold, pleasure and pain come to a man in turn and he must put up with them. Without worrying about the fruit of action, a man must devote himself to the performance of his duty with an evenness of temper. This is yoga, or skill in action. The success of an act lies in performing it, and not in its result, whatever it is. Therefore be calm and do your duty clear of consequences.'

On hearing all this Arjuna said, 'The course of conduct you have mapped for me seems to be beyond my capacity. Not to worry about defeat or victory, not to waste a thought on the result,—how can one attain such an evenness of temper and steadfastness in spirit? How does a man with such attainments behave, and how are we to recognize him?'

The Lord replied, 'O king, one who renounces all the cravings which torment the heart and derives his contentment from within himself is said to be a *sthitaprajna* or *samadhista* (one stable in spirit). He is unruffled in adversity, and he does not hanker after happiness. Pleasure and pain are felt through the five senses. Therefore this wise man draws his senses away from sense objects even



as a tortoise draws in his limbs. The tortoise withdraws into his shell when he apprehends danger. But in the case of human beings sense objects are ready to attack the senses at all times; therefore their senses must always be drawn in, and they should be ever ready to fight against sense objects. This is the real battle. Some people resort to self-mortification and fasting as weapons of defence against sense objects. These measures have their limited use. The senses do not make for sense objects so long as a man is fasting, but fasting alone does not destroy his relish for them. On the other hand that relish may be heightened when the fast is broken, and a man can get rid of it only with the grace of God. The senses are so powerful that they drag a man behind them by force if he is not on his guard. Therefore a man must always keep them under control. This end he can achieve only if he turns his eyes inward, realizes God Who resides in his heart and is devoted to Him. One who thus looks upon Me as his goal and surrenders his all to Me, keeping his senses in control, is a yogi stable in spirit. On the other hand if a man is not master of his senses, he is always musing on the objects of sense and conceives an attachment for them, so that he can hardly think of anything else. From this attachment arises desire; and when the desire is thwarted he gets angry. Anger drives him nearly mad. He cannot understand what he is about. He thus loses his memory, behaves in a disorderly manner and comes to an ignoble end. When a man's senses rove at will, he is like a rudderless ship which is at the mercy of the gale and is broken to pieces on the rocks. Men should therefore abandon all desires and restrain their senses, so that these do not indulge in undesirable activity. The eyes then will look straight and that too only at holy objects; the ears will listen to hymns in praise of God or to cries of distress; hands and feet will be engaged in service. Indeed all the organs of sense and of action will be employed in helping a man to do his duty and making him a fit recipient of the grace of God. And once the grace of God has descended upon him, all his sorrows are at an end. As snow melts in the sunshine, all pain vanishes when the grace of God shines upon

him and he is said to be stable in spirit. But if a man is not stable-minded, how can he think good thoughts? Without good thoughts there is no peace, and without peace there is no happiness. Where a stable-minded man sees things clear as daylight, the unstable man distracted by the turmoil of the world is as good as blind. On the other hand what is pure in the eyes of the worldly wise looks unclean to and repels the stable-minded man. Rivers continuously flow into the sea, but the sea remains unmoved; in the same way all sense objects come to the yogi, but he always remains calm like the sea. Thus one who abandons all desires, is free from pride and selfishness and behaves as one apart, finds peace. This is the condition of a perfect man of God, and he who is established therein even at the final hour is saved (lit. set free, *mukta*).'

### Chapter III

When Krishna had thus set forth the marks of identification for a *sthitaprajna* person, Arjuna received the impression that one had only to sit quiet in order to attain such a state, as Krishna had not made the slightest reference to any need for action on his part. He therefore asked Krishna, 'It seems as if you hold that knowledge is superior to action. If so, why are you urging me to this terrible deed and thus confusing my mind? Please tell me clearly where my welfare lies.'

Krishna replied: 'O sinless Arjuna, since the beginning of time seekers have taken one or the other of two different paths. In one of these the pride of place is given to knowledge and in the other it is given to action. But you will find that freedom from action cannot be attained without action, that wisdom never comes to a man simply on account of his having ceased to act. Man does not become perfect merely by renouncing everything. Don't you see that every one of us is doing something or other all the time? Our very nature impels us to action. Such being the law of nature, one who sits with folded hands but lets his mind dwell on the objects of sense is a fool and may even be called a hypocrite. Rather than indulge in such senseless inactivity, is it not better that a man should control



the senses, overcome his likes and dislikes, and engage himself in some activity or other without fuss and in a spirit of detachment? Do your allotted duty, restraining the organs of sense, for that is better than inaction. An idler will only meet his end the sooner for his idleness. But while acting, remember that action leads to bondage unless it is performed in a spirit of sacrifice. Sacrifice (*yajna*) means exerting oneself for the benefit of others, in a word service. And where service is rendered for service's sake, there is no room for attachment, likes and dislikes. Perform such a sacrifice; render such service. When Brahma created the universe, He created sacrifice along with it, as it were, and said to mankind, "Go forth into the world; serve one another and prosper. Look upon all creatures as gods. Serve and propitiate those gods, so that being pleased they will be gracious to you and fulfil your wishes unasked." Therefore understand that whoever enjoys the fruits of the earth, without serving the people and without having first given them their share, is a thief. And he who enjoys them after having given all creatures their share is entitled to such enjoyment and is thus freed from sin. On the other hand, those who labour only for themselves are sinners and eat the fruit of sin. It is a law of nature that creatures are sustained by food, food production depends on the rains, and the rains descend on the earth on account of *yajna*, that is to say, the labour of all creatures. There is no rain where there are no creatures, and it does rain where they are there. All live by labour; none can remain idle and live, and if this is true of the lower forms of life, it is still more applicable to man. Action takes its origin from Brahma and Brahma from the imperishable *brahma*; therefore the imperishable *brahma* is present in all kinds of sacrifice or service. And whoever breaks this chain of mutual service is a sinner and he lives in vain.

'When a man enjoys peace of mind and contentment, it may be said that there is nothing left for him to do. He does not stand to gain by action or by inaction. He has no personal interests to serve; and yet he must not cease to offer sacrifice. Therefore do your duty from day to day without entertaining likes and dislikes and in a spirit of

detachment. He who acts in such a spirit enjoys the beatific vision. Then again if even a selfless king like Janaka reached perfection all the while working for the good of the people, how can you behave in a way different from his? Whatever a good and great man does, common people imitate. Take My own case for instance. I have nothing to gain by action, and yet ceaselessly do I pour myself in action. Hence it is that people too go on working more or less. But what would happen if I ceased to work? The world would collapse if the sun, the moon and the stars ceased to move. And it is I who set them in motion and regulate their activity. But there is a difference between My attitude and the attitude of the common man. I act in the spirit of perfect detachment while he harbours attachment and works in his own interest. If a wise man like you ceased to act, others too would do the same and their minds would be unsettled. Therefore do your duty without attachment, so that others might not cease to work and might gradually learn to work without attachment. Man is bound to work in obedience to and in conformity with his own nature. Only a fool thinks that he himself is the doer. To breathe is a part of man's nature; when an insect settles upon the eye, the eyelid moves of its own accord. And nobody says, "I take in the air" or "I move the eyelid". In the same manner why should not all human actions be performed in accordance with the qualities of nature? Why should there be any egoism about it? In order that a man may be able thus to act naturally and without attachment, the best thing for him to do is to dedicate all his actions to Me and perform them without egoism as a mere instrument in My hands. When a man thus gets over selfishness, all his actions are natural and free from taint and he escapes many a trouble. Actions then have no binding force for him. Action being natural, it is sheer egoism to outrage nature and to claim to be inactive. The victim of such egoism will externally appear not to act, but his mind is always active in scheming. This is worse than external activity and has all the greater binding force.

'As a matter of fact the senses feel attraction and aversion for their respective objects. For instance the ears



like to hear some things and do not like to hear other things. The nose likes to smell the rose, and does not like to smell dirt. This is also true of the other organs of sense. Therefore what man has to do is not to submit to these two robbers, namely, attraction and repulsion. If one wishes to escape their attentions, he must not go about in search of action. He must not hanker after this today, that tomorrow and the other thing the day after. But he should hold himself ready to render for the sake of God such service as falls to his share. Thus he will cultivate within himself the feeling that whatever he does is in fact an act of God and not his own, and his egoism will be a thing of the past. This is *svadharma* (one's own duty). One must stick to *svadharma*, for it is the best for himself at any rate. *Paradharma* (another's duty) may appear to be better, but even so it should be looked upon as dangerous. *Moksha* (salvation) lies in embracing death while doing one's own duty.'

When Krishna said that action performed by one who is free from likes and dislikes is sacrifice, Arjuna asked, 'What is it that makes a man commit sin? Very often it seems as if he were driven to sin by some outsider against his own will.'

Krishna replied: 'The slave drivers in this case are Kama (desire) and Krodha (anger). These are like blood brothers. If desire is not satisfied, anger is the inevitable consequence. One who is the slave of desire and anger is said to be inspired by *rajoguna* (the quality of passion), which is man's greatest enemy and against which he has to fight day in, day out. As dust hides a mirror, smoke suffocates a fire and the womb covers the embryo, even so anger deprives knowledge of its lustre and suffocates it. And desire is insatiable like fire, and taking possession of man's senses, mind and intellect, knocks him down. Therefore first control your senses, and then conquer the mind. When you have done this, the intellect also will obey your orders. For though among the senses, the mind and the intellect, the mind is greater than the senses and the intellect is greater than the mind, the soul is the greatest of all. Man has no idea of his own strength or soul force, and tends to believe that the senses, the mind and the intellect

are not amenable to his control. But when once he has gained confidence in soul force, everything else becomes easy as a matter of course. And desire, anger and their countless hosts hold no terror for him who has mastered the senses, the mind and the intelligence.'

I call this chapter the key to an understanding of the Gita, and the gist of it is that life is given us for service and not for enjoyment. We have therefore to impart a sacrificial character to our lives. Intellectual assent to this proposition is only the first step, but such assent and conduct in terms of that assent are bound to rid our heart of its impurities in course of time. But what is real service? In order to obtain the right answer to this question, restraint of the senses is essential, as it gives us a clearer and clearer vision of the God of truth. Service rendered with selfish motives ceases to be sacrifice. Hence the urgent need for the spirit of detachment. When this is understood, all manner of controversies lose their meaning for us. 'Did Krishna really ask Arjuna to kill his relatives? Could such killing ever be a part of one's duty?' Questions like these are set at rest for ever. When detachment governs our actions, even the weapon raised in order to strike an enemy down falls out of our hand. But a mere pretence of detachment serves no useful purpose. If only we persevere in our effort, detachment may come to us, perhaps the very first day, or may be only after a thousand years. We must not worry over the time this takes, for the effort carries within itself the seeds of success. We must however be on our guard and make sure that it is a genuine effort, and that there is no self-deception. And this is certainly possible for us all.

### Chapter IV

The Lord says to Arjuna:

'The yoga of selfless action which I commend to you is an ancient truth; I am not propounding any new doctrine. I have declared it to you, as you are my devoted friend, in order to heal the conflict in your mind. Whenever goodness weakens and evil grows from strength to strength, I incarnate Myself and protect the good and destroy the



wicked. Those who are aware of this power (*maya*) of Mine are confident that evil is bound to go under. I am always by the good man's side. He never strays from the strait and narrow path and comes to Me at last, for he meditates on Me and hides himself in Me and thus is delivered from passion and anger and is purified by austerity and wisdom. As a man sows, so he reaps. None can escape from the operation of the laws I have made. I established the four *varnas* (classes, not castes) by the different distribution of qualities and actions. However I am not their author, for I do not desire the fruits of action and have nothing to do with the merit or demerit arising therefrom. This divine *maya* (course of action) is worth knowing. All activities prevalent in the world are subject to divine laws, and yet God is not defiled by them. Therefore He is and also is not their author. And a man who does likewise and acts in a spirit of detachment without being defiled by actions and by the yearning for their fruit is sure to be saved. In action he sees inaction and he understands at once what is wrong action. Wrong actions are all those that are inspired by desire and cannot be performed in the absence of desire, such for instance as theft, adultery and the like. These simply cannot be done in a spirit of detachment. Therefore those who do the duty that lies nearest without desire and scheming for the fruit of the action may be said to have burnt up their actions in the fire of wisdom (*jnana*). A man who has thus abandoned the attachment to the fruit of action is always contented, always independent. He has his mind under control. He gives up all his possessions. And his activity is natural like the bodily functions of a healthy individual. He is free from any pride or even consciousness that he is acting on his own. He has the realization that he is a mere instrument of the divine will. What does it matter whether he meets with success or with failure? He is neither elated by the one, nor unnerved by the other. All his work is done as a sacrifice (*yajna*), that is to say, as service to the world. He meditates upon God in all his actions and in the end comes to Him.

‘There are many forms of sacrifice, the root of which lies in purity and service, such as, for instance, control of

the senses, charity and *pranayama* (breath control) practised with a view to self-purification. Knowledge of these can be acquired from a wise teacher (*guru*) through humility, earnestness and service. If anybody indulges in various activities which he thinks are *yajna*, without any understanding of what *yajna* is, he will only do harm to himself and to the world. It is therefore necessary that all actions should be performed intelligently. This wisdom (*jnana*) is not mere book learning. In it there is no room for doubt. It begins with faith and ends in experience. It enables a man to see all beings in himself and to see himself in God so that everything appears to him to be actually informed by God. Such wisdom effects the salvation of the worst of sinners. It releases the seeker from the bondage of action, so that he is not affected by its results. There is nothing else in the world so holy as this wisdom. Therefore try to obtain it with a heart full of faith in God and with the senses under control, so that you will enjoy perfect peace of mind.'

The third, the fourth and the following fifth chapter should be read together, as they explain to us what the yoga of selfless action (*anasakti*) is and what are the means of practising it. If these three chapters are properly understood, the reader will have less difficulty in tackling what follows. The remaining chapters deal in detail with the ways and means of achieving *anasakti*. We should study the Gita from this point of view, and if we pursue this study, we shall find without much trouble a solution of the problems which confront us from day to day. This calls for daily practice. Let everybody try it. If for instance he is angry, let him remember the verse dealing with anger and subdue that enemy. Supposing we heartily dislike somebody, or are impatient or gluttonous or in doubt as to whether we should do or should not do something or other, all these difficulties can be solved with the help of Mother Gita if we have faith in it and give it constant study. Our daily recitation of the Gita as well as this series of letters is a means to this end.

### Chapter V

Arjuna said, 'You speak highly of wisdom, so that I am inclined to think that action is unnecessary. But then



you also praise action, thus making me feel that unselfish performance of action is the thing to do. My mind will be at peace only if you tell me definitely which of the two is better.'

The Lord replied, '*Sannyasa* means wisdom and *Karma-yoga* means selfless action. Both of them are good, but if I had to choose between the two, I should say that yoga or selfless action is better. The man who does not hate any one or anything, does not long for anything and is free from the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain, is a *sannyasi* (wise man, lit. one who renounces the world), no matter whether he is or is not a performer of action. He easily casts off the chain that binds him. Only the ignorant speak of wisdom and action as different, not the learned. The fruit of both is the same; both lead to an identical goal. Therefore he who sees them as one sees truly. The man of pure wisdom achieves his object by merely willing it, and has no need to perform an outward act. When the city of Mithila was on fire, others were bound to rush to it and fight the fire. But King Janaka contributed to this fight by his mental determination only, for his servants were ready to obey his commands. If he had run about with a water pot to quench the fire, he would only have done harm; others would have stared at him and failed to perform their own duty, or at the most would have rushed here and there with a view to the King's safety. But it is not given to every one of us to become a Janaka at once. It is indeed a very difficult task to reach a Janaka-like state. Only one in a million can reach it as the fruit of service extending over many lives, and it is not a bed of roses either. As a man goes on performing selfless action, his thought grows from strength to strength and he less and less resorts to external action. But he is hardly conscious of this change, and he has not this change in view either. He is devoted only to service, with the result that his power of rendering service increases to such an extent that he hardly seems to rest from service. And finally his service is limited to thought alone, just as an object in extraordinary motion seems to be at rest. It is obviously improper to say that such a man does nothing. But this lofty state can, as a rule, be only imagined,

and not experienced. Hence my preference for karmayoga. Millions derive the fruit of *sannyasa* (wisdom, lit. renunciation) from selfless action alone. They would fall between two stools if they tried their hand at *sannyasa*. If they take to *sannyasa*, it is very likely that they will become hypocrites, and as they have ceased to perform action, they are lost altogether. But a man who has purified himself by means of selfless action, who has his mind and his senses under control and who has identified himself with all beings, loving them as himself;—such a man stands apart from action although he is acting all the time, and is not bound by it. He talks, he walks, he takes part in normal human activity, but his activity seems to be merely a function of his organs of sense, and he himself seems to be doing nothing. The bodily functions of a physically healthy person are natural and spontaneous. His stomach for instance functions independently of him; he has not to bother about its functioning. Similarly a spiritually healthy person, though acting through his body, is not tainted by it and may be said to be doing nothing. Therefore a man should dedicate all his actions to Brahma (God) and perform them on His behalf, so that in spite of his activity he does not earn either merit or demerit and is untouched by either like a lotus leaf which is untouched by water. Therefore a yogi (man of selfless action), performing action with the body, mind and understanding in a spirit of detachment and without egotism, purifies himself and enters into peace. The a-yogi, on the other hand, being attached to the fruit of action, is a prisoner bound by his own desires. The yogi lives blissfully in the city with nine gates that is his body, having renounced all actions by his mind, and realized that he himself is not doing or getting done anything at all. The man with a purified soul does not commit sin, nor does he do any meritorious deed. He who acts in a spirit of detachment, having destroyed his egotism and renounced the fruit of action, becomes a mere machine moving at the will and pleasure of the Master Mechanic or an instrument in the hands of God. The question, therefore, of his earning merit or demerit does not arise. On the other hand, the ignorant man is always counting his merit and demerit, and sinking deeper and deeper into



the pit, so that in the end the only thing he has earned is demerit. But as regards the man who destroys his own ignorance by wisdom from day to day, his spontaneous actions grow purer and purer, and appear perfect and meritorious in the world's eyes. He sees all things equal. He is equiminded towards a learned and humble Brahma (God)-knowing Brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a degraded human being who is worse than a beast. That is to say, he serves them all with equal devotion. He does not honour any one of them or treat another with contempt. The man of selfless action holds himself to be the world's debtor, and he repays what he owes to every one else and does him full justice. Here on earth he takes the creation captive and is filled with the spirit of the Supreme. He is not elated if anybody does something pleasant; nor is he pained if foul abuse is poured upon him. The man attached to the world seeks happiness from outside himself. On the other hand he who acts in a spirit of selfless detachment discovers the spring of eternal peace in himself having withdrawn his mind from external objects. All sensual pleasures are a source of pain. One should resist the rush of desire, anger and the like. The selfless yogi is constantly engaged in doing good to all creatures. His mind is free from doubt. He is not of the world though he is in the world. He turns his eyes inward by means of *pranayama* (control of breath) etc. and conquers desire, fear and anger. He knows Me alone to be the supreme Lord of all, the Friend and the recipient of sacrificial offerings, and enters into My peace.'

### Chapter VI

The Lord said: 'The man who does his duty without any selfish desire for fruit may be called a *sannyasi* as well as a yogi. But he who abstains from action altogether is only an idler. The root of the matter is that one should not allow his mind to flit from one object of desire to another and from that to a third. He who would practise yoga, i.e. evenness of temper (*samatvam*), cannot but perform action. The man who has achieved such evenness of temper will be serene, because his mere thoughts are charged with the strength of action. A yogi is one who is not attached to the objects

of sense or to action and whose mind has ceased to roam restlessly.

‘A man can be saved or lost by himself alone. Therefore he becomes his own friend or his own enemy as the case may be. To one who has subdued his mind his soul is a friend; while the soul is an enemy for him who has failed to achieve self-control. The test for self-control is that heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour do not disturb one’s inner serenity. He is a yogi who is a man of knowledge as well as experience, who is unwavering and master of his senses and to whom gold, stone and earth seem all alike. He regards with an equal eye friend and foe, sinner and saint. With a view to attain this state a man should stabilize his mind, divest it of all sensual desires, and meditate in solitude on the Supreme Soul. It is not enough to practise yogic *asanas* (postures) etc. In order to achieve evenness of temper, one must scrupulously keep the major observances (*vratas*) such as *brahmacharya* (chastity) and the like. A man who thus takes his place on a firm seat, keeps the observances and concentrates his mind on God enters into perfect peace.

‘This equanimity is not for one who overeats or merely fasts, nor for one who is too much addicted to sleep or to vigils. Its seeker has to keep a sense of proportion in all his actions such as eating and drinking, sleeping and keeping awake. To overeat one day and fast the next day, to oversleep for a day and keep a vigil the next, to work hard for a day and pass the next in idleness is no characteristic of a yogi. The yogi is stable-minded at all times, and is without effort free from all desires. He is like an unflickering lamp burning in a windless place. He is not tossed to and fro by dramatic events on the world-stage or by his own brain waves. Such mental poise can be acquired by slow but steady effort. The mind is fickle and restless, but it should be gradually stabilized, for one can have peace of mind only when he is firm of understanding. In order thus to stabilize the mind, he should constantly fix it on the soul. He will then see all beings in himself and himself in all beings, for he will see Me in all beings and all beings in Me. He who is absorbed in Me, and sees Me everywhere ceases to



be himself, so that he is at all times attuned to Me irrespective of what he is doing, and is incapable of sin.'

Yoga thus described seemed to Arjuna to be a tall order, and he exclaimed, 'How is one to achieve such equanimity? The human mind is restless like a monkey, and as difficult to control as the wind. How is it to be curbed?'

The Lord replied, 'You are right. But if a man earnestly sets about conquering attachment and aversion, yoga will not be difficult for him to practise. But it should be clear to you that it is not for one who cannot control his mind.'

Then Arjuna posed another question, 'Supposing a man has faith, but is lax in his effort and is thus unsuccessful in perfecting himself, what happens to him? Is he destroyed like a broken cloud in the sky?'

The Lord said, 'Such a man of faith is never lost, for no one who takes the right path ever comes to an evil end. After death he lives for a time in some celestial world according to his merit and is then reborn on the earth into a holy family. But such a birth is difficult to obtain. He then regains the mental impressions developed in his former lives, and struggling harder for perfection, reaches the supreme goal. Thus making an assiduous effort some attain equanimity soon, while others do so after a number of lives in accordance with the measure of their faith and endeavour. This evenness of temper is superior to asceticism, to knowledge and to sacred rites, for these latter are after all only means to the end of equanimity. Do you therefore become even-minded and a yogi. And even among yogis hold him to be the best who dedicates his all to Me and worships Me alone in full faith.'

*Pranayama* (control of breath) and *asanas* (yogic postures) are referred to appreciatively in this chapter, but we should remember that at the same time the Lord has stressed the need for *brahmacharya*, i.e. keeping the observances calculated to take us nearer and nearer to God. It should be clearly understood that the mere practice of *asanas* and the like can never take us to the goal of even-mindedness. *Asanas* and *pranayama* may be of some slight help in steadying the mind and making it single-purposed, provided that they

are practised to that end. Otherwise they are no better than other methods of physical training. They are very useful indeed as physical exercise and I believe that this type of exercise is good for the soul, and may be performed from a bodily standpoint. But I have observed that these practices do only harm when indulged in for the acquisition of supernormal powers (*siddhi*) and the performance of miracles. This chapter should be studied as a summary of the teaching in the preceding three chapters. It cheers us up in our spiritual struggle. We should never be downhearted and give up the endeavour to reach evenness of temper.

### Chapter VII

The Lord said, 'O king, I will tell you how a man who devotes his whole mind to Me, takes refuge in Me and practises karmayoga can have perfect knowledge of Me free from the shadow of a doubt. I will declare to you this knowledge based on experience, which having been known, nothing more here remains to be known. Hardly one from among thousands strives to acquire this knowledge; and perhaps one only of these strivers makes a success of it.

'Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism — this is the eightfold composition of My *prakriti* (nature). This is the lower nature; the other is higher nature, that is, life. This world is born of these two natures, that is to say, from the coming together of body and soul. Therefore I am the cause of the origin and destruction of all things. As pearls are strung on a thread, even so is the world held together by Me. Thus I am the taste in the waters, the light in the sun and the moon, the syllable "Om" in the Vedas, the sound in ether, the spirit of enterprise in men, the sweet smell in the earth, the brightness in fire, the life in all that lives, the austerity of ascetics, the intelligence of the intelligent, the pure strength of the strong, and the craving of all beings which does not run counter to righteousness. In short you should understand that all that belongs to the states of \*sattva, \*rajas and \*tamas proceeds from Me, and

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\*Harmony, passion, sloth; or rhythm, activity, inertia.



depends upon Me alone. People deluded by these three qualities (*gunas*) do not recognize Me Who am imperishable. My Maya made of these qualities is hard to overcome. But those who take refuge in Me pass beyond this Maya, that is, the three *gunas*. Foolish evil-doers cannot think of coming to Me even in their dreams. Being steeped in illusion, they roam in darkness and do not acquire knowledge. But the doers of good deeds worship Me. Some of them do so in order to obtain relief in their distress; others seek for knowledge of Me. A third group are inspired by a desire to get something for themselves while others worship Me with understanding, thinking it to be their duty. Worship of Me means service of My creation. This service is rendered by some because of their misery, by others in order to gain some advantage, by a third group out of curiosity as regards the outcome of such activity and by a fourth group who know what they are about and for whom service of others is something that they cannot do without. These last are My wise devotees, dearer to Me than all the rest of them. Or rather they know Me best and are nearest to Me. Their wisdom is the fruit of a quest extending over a number of lives, and when they have acquired this wisdom, they see nothing in the world except Me, Vasudeva. But those who are smitten by a variety of desires resort to other deities. I alone, however, am the giver of rewards commensurate with the devotion of each. The achievement too of these devotees of limited understanding is limited, but they rest content with it. These men in their ignorance imagine that they know Me through the senses. They do not realize that My imperishable and supreme form is beyond the reach of the senses and cannot be grasped with the hands, the ears, the nose, the eyes. Thus the ignorant do not recognize Me though I am the creator of all things. This is my *yogamaya* (creative power). Pleasure and pain are the necessary consequence of likes and dislikes and keep mankind under the influence of delusion. But those who have freed themselves from delusion and purified their thoughts and actions hold firmly to their vows and offer Me constant worship. They know Me in the form of perfect Brahma (the Absolute) as well as of individual self embodied as various kinds of creatures

(*adhyatma*), and My creative action (*karma*). Those who thus know Me as the One who governs the material (*adhibhuta*) and the divine (*adhidaiva*) aspects and the sacrifices (*adhiyajna*) and have attained evenness of temper are released from the bondage of birth and death after they have died. For having acquired the knowledge of reality their mind ceases to dwell on trivialities and seeing the whole universe to be filled with the spirit of God, they are absorbed in Him.'

### Chapter VIII

Arjuna asked, 'You spoke of *Brahma* (the Absolute), *adhyatma*, *karma*, *adhibhuta*, *adhidaiva* and *adhiyajna*, but I do not understand the meaning of all these words. Again you say that at the hour of death you are revealed to those who know you as *adhibhuta* etc. and have attained evenness of temper. Please explain all this to me.'

The Lord replied, '*Brahma* is the imperishable Supreme aspect of God, and *adhyatma* is the individual soul living in the body of all beings as the doer and the enjoyer. Karma is the process through which all beings come into existence, or in other words the process of creation. *Adhibhuta* is Myself as the perishable body, and *adhiyajna* is the individual soul purified through sacrifice. Thus whether as the body or as the foolish soul or as the purified soul or as *Brahma*, it is I who am everywhere. And never doubt this that he who meditates on Me in all these aspects at the hour of death, forgets himself, is careful of nothing and desirous of nothing will be united with Me. Whatever a man constantly dwells on in his mind and remembers at the time of death is realized by him. Therefore at all times you should remember Me and set your mind and heart upon Me and you will surely come to Me. You may say that it is hard thus to stabilize the mind. But you take it from Me that one can become single-minded by daily practice and constant endeavour, for as I told you just now, all embodied beings are in the essence Myself in various forms. For this he should prepare himself from the very first so that his mind does not go astray at the time of death, but is steeped in devotion, keeps the life force (*prana*) steady, and thinks only of Me as the



omniscient, the ancient, the ruler, the subtle supporter of all and dispeller of ignorance like the sun which drives darkness away.

‘This supreme state is known to the Vedas as *akshara* (the Imperishable) Brahma and is reached by sages who have freed themselves from likes and dislikes. All who desire to reach it observe *brahmacharya*, i.e. keep body, mind and speech under control and give up all objects of sense in these three ways. Men and women who die, having controlled the senses and uttering the sacred syllable Om and remembering Me as they depart, reach the supreme state. Their mind is never distracted by other thoughts, and when they have thus come to Me, they are not reborn into this painful condition. To come to Me is the only means of breaking the vicious circle of birth and death.

‘Men measure time by the human span of a hundred years, and during that period do thousands of questionable deeds. But time is infinite. A thousand yugas (ages) make up the day of Brahma; compared with it a human day or even a hundred years of human life are as nothing. What is the use of counting such infinitesimal measures of time? Human life is as only a moment in the infinite cycle of time. It is up to us therefore to think of God alone to the exclusion of all else. How can we afford to run after momentary pleasures? Creation and dissolution have gone on unceasingly during Brahma’s day and night and will do so in future too.

‘Brahma who creates and dissolves beings is only an aspect of Me. He is the unmanifested which cannot be perceived by the senses. Beyond this unmanifested there is yet another unmanifested aspect of Mine of which I have spoken to you. He who reaches it is not reborn, for there is no day or night so far as this is concerned. This is a calm and immovable aspect, which can be realized only by single-minded devotion. It supports and pervades the whole universe.

‘It is said that one who dies in the bright half of the month during Uttarayana (the northward movement of the sun from January to July) comes to Me if he is mindful of Me at last, and that he who dies in the dark half of the month during Dakshinayana (the southward movement

from July to January) is reborn into the world. Uttarayana and the bright fortnight here may be interpreted to mean the path of selfless service; and Dakshinayana and the dark half of month mean selfishness. The path of service is the path of wisdom, and the path of selfishness is the path of ignorance. He who treads the path of wisdom is released from the bondage of birth and death while he who takes the path of ignorance becomes a bonds slave. After having realized the difference between the two, who would be so foolish as to prefer to walk in the way of ignorance? All men should learn to discriminate between the paths, renounce all fruits of merit, act in a spirit of detachment and discharge their duty with all their heart and soul, and thus endeavour to reach supreme state described by Me.'

### Chapter IX

Having described the lofty state of a yogi in the last verse of the preceding chapter, the Lord now naturally proceeds to sing the glory of *bhakti* (devotion). For the yogi in terms of the Gita is neither a dry-as-dust man of knowledge, nor a devotee carried away by his own enthusiasm, but a selfless performer of action imbued with the spirit of wisdom as well as devotion. So the Lord said, 'As you are free from hatred, I shall now tell you the secret of wisdom, a knowledge of which will contribute to your welfare. This is the holy knowledge above all other and is easy to translate into action. Those who have no faith in it fail to find Me. Men cannot perceive My unmanifested form by their senses; yet it pervades the universe. It supports the universe; the universe does not support it. Again in a sense it may be said that all these beings are not in Me, and I am not in them. Although I am the source of all beings and their sustainer, they are not in Me and I am not in them; for in ignorance they do not know Me and are not devoted to Me. Know this to be my divine mystery.

'But though it seems as if I am not in these beings, I am like the air moving everywhere. All creatures pass into My nature at the end of a cycle and are reborn at the beginning of creation. These acts are Mine, but they



do not bind Me, for I act in a spirit of detachment and am indifferent as to the fruit they bear. These events happen as such is My nature. But people do not recognize Me in such a guise and deny My existence altogether. They entertain vain aspirations, perform vain actions and are full of ignorance, so that they can be said to partake of the nature of demons. But those who abide in the divine nature know and worship Me as the imperishable creator. They are firm in their determination. They are always striving for virtue, praising Me, and meditating on Me. Others again believe Me to be one or to be many. There are countless attributes of Me; therefore those who believe Me to be many think of different attributes as so many different faces of Mine. But one and all, they are my devotees.

‘I am the intention to offer a sacrifice, I the sacrifice itself, I the offering made to the spirits of the fathers, I the herb, I the sacred verse (*mantra*), I the oblation, I the fire to which it is offered. I am the father of this world, I the mother, the supporter and the grandsire, the object of knowledge, the syllable Om, \*Rigveda, \*Samaveda and \*Yajurveda. I am the end of the pilgrim’s path, the sustainer, the lord, the witness. I am the shelter, the lover, the origin, the dissolution, heat and cold, being and non-being. Those who perform the rites mentioned in the Vedas do so in order to gain their fruit. They may thus attain the world of heaven, but they have to return to the world of mortals and to die. But if a man meditates upon Me with an undistracted mind and worships Me alone, I bear all his burdens, supply all his needs and protect his possessions. Some others who worship other deities with faith in their heart are victims of ignorance, but they are really worshipping Me for I am the lord of all sacrifices. However they do not know Me in My comprehensive nature and therefore are unable to reach the supreme state. Worshippers of the gods go to the world of the gods, the ancestor worshippers to the world of the fathers and those who worship the spirits go to the spirits, while those who worship Me with the right approach come to Me. I accept the offering of love made

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\*The three oldest sacred books of the Hindus (*trayi*).

by seekers, even if it be only a leaf or a flower. Therefore whatever you do, do it only as an offering to Me, so that your responsibility for the good and evil results will cease altogether. As you will have renounced all the fruits of action, there will be no more births and deaths for you. I am the same to all beings; none is hateful or dear to Me. But those who worship Me with devotion are in Me, and I am in them. This is not partiality but only the natural consequence of their devotion. Devotion indeed works wonders. He who worships Me in utter devotion becomes a saint even if he has been a sinner. As darkness vanishes before the sun, a man abandons his evil ways as soon as he comes to Me. Therefore know for certain that My devotee shall not perish. He becomes a man of religion and enters into My peace. Those who are born in the so-called lower castes and illiterate women, \*vaishyas and \*shudras who take refuge in Me come to Me. It goes without saying, that so do Brahmanas and Kshatriyas who lead a holy life. Every devotee enjoys the fruit of his devotion. Therefore you who have been born in this unsubstantial world should worship Me and work out your salvation. Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, offer your sacrifices for My sake, prostrate yourself before Me. And if you are intent on Me and reduce yourself to zero by attuning yourself to Me, you are sure to come to Me.'

Note: We learn from this chapter that devotion (*bhakti*) means attachment (*asakti*) to God. This is the royal road to the cultivation of a selfless spirit. Therefore we are told at the very beginning that devotion is the sovereign yoga and is easy to practise. It is easy to practise if it takes hold of our heart, but hard going if it does not. Hence it has been described as something for which we have to offer our life itself as the price. But he who has plunged into it enjoys perfect bliss though it scares the mere spectator. Sudhanva was laughing as he lay in the boiling oil while

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\*The third and the fourth classes of ancient Hindu society, meaning 'farmers and merchants' and 'servants' respectively. Brahmanas (priests) and Kshatriyas (soldiers) constituted the first and the second classes.



the bystanders were seized with terror and anxiety. The 'untouchable' Nanda is said to have danced as he was tried by the ordeal of fire. We need not bother whether or not these are true stories. But the fact is that a man reaches such a state of calmness and imperturbability when he is absorbed in something or other. He forgets himself. But who would set his heart on anything except God? 'Do not prefer the bitter nimba to sugar-cane or the glowworm to the sun and the moon'. The ninth chapter thus shows that renunciation of the fruit of action is impossible without devotion (*bhakti*). Its last verse sums up the whole chapter and in a word means, 'Seeking nothing, give yourself utterly to Me'.

### Chapter X

The Lord said, 'Hear once more what I say with a view to the welfare of devotees. Even gods and great sages do not know my beginning, for the very simple reason that I am without beginning myself and am the origin of the universe including gods and sages. The wise man who knows Me to be unborn and without beginning is liberated from all sins, for when he realizes Me as such and himself as My child or as part and parcel of Me, he overcomes the human liability to sin. Ignorance of one's real nature is the root of sin.

'As all beings derive from Me, so do the various natures distributed to them, such as for instance forgiveness, truth, joy and sorrow, birth and death, fear and fearlessness. Those who know all these to be My glorious manifestations easily become even-minded, as they cease to be egotistic. Their heart is fixed on Me. They dedicate their all to Me. I am the only subject of their conversation. They glorify Me and live in happiness and contentment. To these loving worshippers always aware of Me I grant the power of understanding, by means of which they come to Me.'

Arjuna then praised the Lord, 'You are the supreme Brahma, the highest abode, and the Lord. You Yourself say that sages worship you as the First of the Gods, the Birthless, the All-pervading. O Lord, O Father, no one knows Your real nature; it is known to you alone. Now please tell me your glorious manifestations, and explain to me how I may recognize you by meditation.'

The Lord replied, 'There is no end to My divine manifestations, but I shall name the chief of these only. I am the *atman* (soul) dwelling in the heart of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle and the end of them all. Of the Adityas I am Vishnu. Among the lights I am the light-giving sun. Of the Maruts (wind-gods) I am Marichi. Among the stars I am the moon. Of the Vedas I am the Samaveda. Of the gods I am Indra. Of the sense-organs I am the mind. Of beings I am consciousness. Of the Rudras I am Shankara (Shiva). Of the Yakshas and Rakshasas I am Kubera. Of the Daityas (demons) I am Prahlada. Of beasts I am the lion. Of birds I am the eagle. Indeed I am even the gambling of the cheats. Whatever, good or evil, happens in this world happens only by My permission. Realizing this men should give up their pride and steer clear of evil, for I am the dispenser of the fruits of their good and bad deeds. You should realize that only a single fraction of Mine sustains the entire universe.'

### Chapter XI

Arjuna, asking the Lord for a favour, said, 'O Supreme Lord, by teaching me the truth about the soul, you have dispelled my ignorance. You are All, the Creator and the Destroyer, being Imperishable yourself. If possible please let me have a vision of your divine Form.'

The Lord said, 'There are thousands of my divine forms in various colours. The \*Adityas, the \*Vasus and the \*Rudras—all are unified in My body, as well as all things, animate and inanimate. But you cannot see this my form with those fleshly eyes. Therefore I give you divine sight with which to see Me.'

Sanjaya said to Dhritarashtra, 'O king, speaking thus to Arjuna, the Lord revealed to him His marvellous form which defies description. We see a single sun in the sky every day, but supposing a thousand suns were blazing in the sky, the glory of what Arjuna saw was more dazzling than their accumulated light. The ornaments and the weapons of that Form were similarly divine. Arjuna's hair then stood erect. And he spoke, shaking all over.'

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\*Various classes of Hindu gods. *Trans.*



Arjuna said, 'O God, I see every thing and everybody within your body. Brahma and Shiva are there, and so are the sages and the holy serpents. I see you with countless arms and faces, and find no beginning, middle or end. You shine like a mass of insufferable light, and blaze like fire. You are the ultimate foundation of the universe, the Ancient of Days, and the guardian of eternal law. Wherever I look, I see parts of your body. The sun and the moon are your eyes as it were. You pervade heaven and earth. Your splendour burns up the universe. This world is seized with awe. The gods, the sages, and the siddhas—all are standing with clasped hands and sing your praise. On seeing this stupendous form and brilliance I lose my nerve. My patience and peace are gone. O God, have mercy on Me. I see these people rush into your mouth frightful with tusks as moths fly into a flame and you crush them to powder. Who are you with such an awful form? I cannot understand your ways.'

The Lord said, 'I am Time, the destroyer of worlds. You may or may not fight, but the warriors on both the sides are bound to perish. You are only an instrument of the divine will.'

Arjuna said, 'O God, home of all the world, you are the Imperishable, being and non-being and what is beyond either of them. You are the First of the gods, the Ancient of Days; you are the refuge of the world. You are the one thing which is to be known. You are Vayu (wind), Yama (the God of death and judgment), Agni (fire) and Prajapati (the Creator). Hail to you a thousand times. Now please show me your original form again.'

The Lord then said, 'I showed My world-wide form to you, because I love you. You have seen today something the vision of which cannot be won by Vedic or any other studies, rituals, alms or austerities. Do not be bewildered because you have seen it. Cast away fear, be calm and see my familiar form. That shape of mine which you have seen is hard to see even for the gods and can be seen only by pure devotion. Whoever works for Me, makes Me his supreme good, becomes my devotee, frees himself from attachment and loves all beings, comes to me.'

I have deliberately cut this as well as the last chapter short. This one is full of poetry and therefore should be read frequently either in the original or in translation, so that we may be imbued with the spirit of devotion. Whether we are or not thus imbued can be found by applying the acid test mentioned in the last verse. Devotion is impossible in the absence of total self-surrender and all-embracing love. Self-surrender and a sense of solidarity with all living beings become easy of attainment if we meditate on God as world-destroying time into whose gaping mouths the universe rushes to its doom. This fate is bound to overtake us too all of a sudden, whether we wish for it or not. Thus all distinctions of small and big, high and low, man and woman, men and the lower animals disappear. Seeing that we are all a mere morsel in the mouth of God as the Destroyer, we should become humble and reduce ourselves to zero and cultivate friendship with every one else. If we do this, we shall cease to be afraid of this terrible Form of God. On the other hand it will give us peace of mind.

### Chapter XII

Arjuna asks the Lord, 'Some devotees adore a personal (*sakara*) God while others worship the Absolute (*nirakara*). Which of these two courses is better?'

The Lord replies, 'Those who fix their minds on Me (as the One Life in all) with perfect faith and are absorbed in Me are My devotees indeed. But those who worship the Absolute and restrain and subdue their senses, are equiminded towards all living beings and serve them without looking on some as of a superior and others as of an inferior grade — they also will come to Me. Neither of these two classes of devotees is superior to the other. But a full realization of the Absolute is almost impossible for an embodied being. The Absolute is devoid of all attributes and thus difficult for men even to imagine. Therefore they are all worshippers of a personal God, whether they are aware of it or not.'

'Do you therefore place your mind in Me (the personal God in the universal form) and offer Me your all. If this is not possible, try to restrain the aberrations of the mind; that is to say, by observing the *yamas* and *niyamas*, and



with the help of *pranayama* and yogic exercises, obtain control over the mind. If even this is beyond your capacity, perform all actions for My sake, so that your delusion will be destroyed, and you will be imbued with the spirit of detachment and devotion. If you cannot do even this, renounce the fruits of action, that is, cease to have a desire for the fruits of action, and do the task which is allotted to you. A man can never have any say as regards the fruit of his action, as the nature of the fruit is determined by a number of independent factors. Be you therefore a mere instrument in My hands. I have thus described four methods, none of which is superior to the others. You may adopt any one of the four you like. It may seem as if the path of knowledge (hearing the doctrine, pondering over it, etc.) is easier to take than that of *yamas*, *niyamas*, *pranayama*, *asanas* etc., meditation in worship is easier still and the renunciation of the fruit the easiest of all. But the same method is not equally well suited for all. And some seekers have to adopt all the four methods, which are inter-connected. You must become a devotee one way or other; you may take any path that leads to this destination.

‘Let me tell you what the true devotee is like. He does not hate or bear ill-will to any living creature. He looks on all with love and compassion. He is free from the delusion of “I” and “Mine”. He reduces himself to zero. Pleasure and pain are equally acceptable to him. He forgives the wrong-doer even as he expects to be forgiven himself. He is always contented with his lot, and is unshakable in his resolve. He dedicates his intellect and mind and all to Me. He never molests his fellow-creatures; these are therefore never afraid of him. He does not allow himself to become perturbed by the world. He is free from exultation, sorrow, anger, fear and the like. He seeks nothing for himself. He is pure and skilful in action. He renounces every undertaking. Although he is firm in his resolve, he is indifferent as regards the success or failure of his action; that is to say, he is not anxious about its result. He is alike to friend and foe. Honour and insult are the same to him. He is silent and content with what comes. He moves freely as if he were

alone. He has a steady mind at all times and places. A devotee who behaves like this in faith is dear to me.'

Q. The devotee 'renounces all undertakings.' What does this mean?

A. The devotee will not draw up schemes of future expansion. For example, if a merchant who deals in cloth now has any plans of selling firewood as well in the future, or if he, having one shop only, thinks of opening five more shops, that would be *arambha* (undertaking) on his part, and the devotee will have none of it. This principle is applicable to service of the nation as well. For instance a worker in the Khadi department today will not take up cow-keeping tomorrow, agriculture the day after and medical aid on the fourth day. He will do his best in whatever has come to him. When I am free from egoism, nothing remains for me to do.

सूतरने तांतणे मने हरजीअे बांधी ।

जेम ताणे तेम तेमनी रे, मने लागी कटारी प्रेमनी ।

'The Lord has bound me with a cotton thread; I am His, no matter where He leads me. I have been stabbed with the dagger of love.' A devotee's every activity is planned by God. It comes to him as in the natural course of things. He therefore rests content with, 'this, that or anything else' (येन केनचित् ।). This is the meaning of 'renouncing all undertakings.' The devotee does not cease to work; indeed he is nothing if not a worker. He only ceases to think needless thoughts about his work. It is these that he has to renounce.

इदमद्य मया लब्धं इमं प्राप्स्ये मनोरथम् । गीता १६-१३ ।

'This has been acquired by me today; that purpose I shall gain tomorrow' — this is the opposite of 'renouncing undertakings.'

### Chapter XIII

The Lord said, 'Kṣhetra (the Field)' is another name for the human body and kshetrajna means one who knows the Field. Understand Me as the knower of the Field in all bodies. Real knowledge means discrimination between the Field and the knower of the Field. The five great elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air and ether, individuality



(*ahamkara*), intellect, the unmanifest, the ten senses,\* mind, the five sense objects, desire and hatred, pleasure and pain, *sanghata* (the power of combination inherent in the constituents of the body), consciousness and cohesion, — these constitute the Field with its modifications. Knowledge of these is essential, as they have to be renounced. Wisdom is the foundation on which such renunciation can be based. Wisdom here means and includes humility, unpretentiousness, non-violence, forgiveness, rectitude, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-restraint, indifference to sense objects, absence of egoism, insight into the evil of birth, death, old age, disease and pain, detachment from wife and children, hearth and home, friends and relations, equimindedness to good and bad fortune, wholehearted devotion to God, love of solitude, dislike for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures in company with others, thirst for knowledge of the soul, and at last the beatific vision. And the reverse of this is ignorance. Now let me tell you something about that which has to be known with a view to salvation. That is beginningless supreme Brahma. Brahma is beginningless because it is unborn and was there when there was nothing. It is neither *sat* (existent) nor *asat* (non-existent) but beyond them both. But from another standpoint it can be called *sat*, because it is eternal. Human beings cannot recognize it as such; therefore it is said to be beyond even *sat*. It pervades the whole universe. It may be said to have a thousand hands and feet, and though it seems to have hands and feet, it is devoid of the organs of sense or it does not need these organs. Sense organs are transitory while Brahma is eternal. And although being all-pervasive and all-sustaining, it may be said to be enjoying the qualities (*gunas*), it is free from them. Where there are *gunas*, there is change (*vikara*), but Brahma is changeless. It may be said to be outside all beings, because it is out for those who do not know it. And it is within all beings as it is all-pervading. Similarly it is both moving and unmoving. It is subtle and hence imperceptible. It is

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\*The five organs of perception, viz. hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell, and the five organs of action, viz., tongue, feet, hands and the organs of evacuation and reproduction.

distant as well as near. It is undivided in the sense that it is imperishable though name (*nama*) and form (*rupa*) perish, but it also seems to be divided as we say that it is within all creatures. It creates, preserves and destroys. It is the light of lights beyond darkness, and the end of all knowledge. Brahma which is planted in every heart is *jneya*, the one thing worth knowing. All knowledge is a means to the end of being united with it.

‘God and his *maya* (nature) are both without beginning. Modifications (*vikaras*) are born of *maya* and these give rise to various kinds of action (*karma*). On account of *maya*, the soul experiences pleasure and pain and the fruit of merit (*punya*) and demerit (*papa*). He who, having realized this, does his duty in a spirit of detachment is not born again in spite of his activity, for he beholds the face of God in all faces, and seeing that not a leaf moves but by the divine will, he is free from egotism, understands that he is separate from the body and that the soul, though living in the body, remains by means of knowledge unaffected like the omnipresent ether.’

### Chapter XIV

The Lord said, ‘Once more I will teach you that supreme wisdom which enabled sages to reach the highest perfection. People who find that wisdom and do their duty accordingly are delivered from the cycle of births and deaths. O Arjuna, know me to be the father and mother of all beings. The three *gunas* born of nature, viz. *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (ignorance) bind the soul down. They may be described respectively as the highest, the middling and the lowest. Of these *sattva* is pure and unsullied and gives light; it is therefore the source of happiness. *Rajas* arises from attachment and craving and makes a man indulge in all manner of activities. *Tamas* is rooted in ignorance and delusion and makes one negligent and indolent. In short *sattva* makes for happiness, *rajas* for restlessness and *tamas* for sloth. Sometimes *sattva* prevails, overpowering *rajas* and *tamas*; at other times *rajas* prevails, overpowering *sattva* and *tamas*; at still other times *tamas* prevails, overpowering *sattva* and *rajas*. When the light of wisdom shines



through all the activities of the body it may be known that *sattva* is increasing. Where greed, bustle, unrest and competition are observed, *rajas* is the ruler. And the predominance of *tamas* is characterized by ignorance, sloth and delusion. If *sattva* prevails in a man's life, he is born in the sinless worlds of the great sages after death. If *rajas* dominates his life, he is born among those who are attached to action. And if *tamas* is the ruling principle, he returns to the womb of the senseless. The fruit of *sattvika* action is purity, while the fruit of *rajas* is pain and the fruit of *tamas* is ignorance. A *sattvika* man rises to the higher regions; a *rajasa* person remains in this world, while a *tamasa* individual sinks to the underworld. When a man perceives no doer of action other than these qualities and knows Me who am beyond them he enters into My nature. When the dweller in the body has overcome the three qualities from which all bodies arise, he is freed from birth and death, old age and pain and drinks the nectar of eternal life.'

On hearing that who transcends the qualities makes such great progress on the pilgrim's path, Arjuna asked, 'What are the marks of such perfection? How does such a perfect being conduct himself? And how does he cross over the qualities?'

The Lord replied, 'A man is said to have risen above the qualities when he is not angry if the light and knowledge of *sattva* or the activity and bustle of *rajas* or the delusion and ignorance of *tamas* are there and is not wishful if they are not. He sits like one who is unconcerned and is not disturbed by the qualities. He stands apart unmoved, being aware that they are the doers of all actions. He is even-minded to pleasure and pain as well as to a lump of earth, a stone and gold. The pleasant and the unpleasant are alike to him. He is unaffected by either praise or blame. He is the same in honour and evil fame. He is alike to friend and foe. And he has abandoned all undertakings.

'Do not think that this is a goal you can never reach and that therefore you need not exert yourself. What I have described is the state of a perfect man. The way to it is to serve Me with single-minded devotion. From the third chapter onwards I have pointed out that a man cannot so

much as even breathe without action (*karma*), from which no human being can ever hope to escape. He who would transcend the qualities should dedicate all his actions to Me, and cease to desire their fruits. If he does this, his actions will not be an impediment to his progress, for I am Brahma, immortal life, the eternal law and joy for ever.

‘When a man reduces himself to zero, he sees Me alone everywhere. He is *guna-atita* (one who has crossed over the qualities).’

### Chapter XV

The Lord said, ‘This world is like an *ashvattha* (sacred fig) tree with roots above and branches below and with the Vedic hymns as its leaves. And he who knows it knows the Vedas. The branches of this cosmic tree nourished by the qualities ‘shoot to heaven and sink to earth’ (Sir Edwin Arnold). Sense objects are its sprouts. It is these things of the senses which bind the soul with the bonds of *karma* in the world of men.

‘The real nature of this tree cannot be known here, nor its beginning, nor end, nor foundation.

‘This strongly rooted cosmic tree should be cut down with the weapon of non-co-operation, so that the soul may rise to a higher world from which there is no return to the world of mortals. With this end in view a man should engage himself in the constant worship of the Ancient of Days, from whom all this activity (the cosmic process) seems to flow. The wise man who is free from pride and delusion, victorious over the vice of attachment and devoted to the Supreme Soul, who is free from cravings and to whom pleasure and pain are alike, — that wise man reaches the state which is beyond all change, and which does not need to be illumined by the sun, the moon or fire. That is My supreme abode.

‘An eternal part of Myself transformed into the individual soul in this world draws to itself the senses including the mind which reside in matter. When the soul enters the body or leaves it, it takes these senses with it even as the wind carries fragrance from its places. It enjoys sense objects with the help of the ear, the eye, the senses of touch and



taste, the nose and the mind. The ignorant cannot recognize it as it goes or stays or enjoys itself under the influence of the qualities, but the sages see it with the eye of wisdom. Striving *yogis* see it living in their own bodies, but those who have not achieved evenness of temper cannot see it even if they try.

‘The light of the sun that illumines all the world, that which is in the moon and in fire,—know that all that light is Mine. Permeating the soil I sustain all living beings. I become the sap-producing moon and feed the plants. Becoming the fire of life in the bodies of all living creatures and being united with the life breaths, I digest four kinds of food. I abide in all hearts. From Me are memory and wisdom as well as their absence. I am that which is to be known by all the Vedas. So also I am the author of Vedanta and the knower of the Vedas.

‘There may be said to be two kinds of personalities in this world, namely *kshara* (the perishable) and *a-kshara* (the imperishable). The perishable is all beings; and the imperishable is I who inspire them, and am the same for ever. But beyond either is the highest spirit who is called the Supreme Soul, and who, pervading all, sustains the three worlds. This too is I. I therefore transcend the perishable and even the imperishable, and am known in the world as well as in the Vedas as the supreme reality. The wise man who recognizes Me as such knows all that need be known, and serves Me with his whole being.

‘O sinless Arjuna, I have told you this most secret teaching. By knowing this a man becomes truly wise and reaches the shores of salvation.’

### Chapter XVI

The Lord said, ‘I will now point out the distinction between the divine and the demoniacal natures. Among the signs of the divine are fearlessness, purity of heart, wisdom, evenness of temper, self-control, alms-giving, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity, straightforwardness, non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, peacefulness, not speaking evil of others, compassion to all living beings, absence of greed, gentleness,

modesty, absence of fickleness, vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, internal as well as external, freedom from malice and pride.

‘Among the signs of the demoniacal are hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, cruelty and ignorance.

‘The divine nature leads to liberation while the demoniacal leads to bondage. Arjuna, you are born with the endowments of the divine nature.

‘I will say something more about the demoniacal nature, so that people may easily give it up. Men of such a nature do not know what to do and what to refrain from doing. There is no purity or truth in them, so that they do not observe the rules of good conduct.

‘They hold that the world is unreal, without basis or ruler. For them sex is all the world so that they think of nothing except enjoyment of the objects of sense.

‘They do horrible deeds. They are dull-witted. They hold fast to their wicked thoughts and all their activity is directed only to the destruction of the world. Their desires are insatiable. They are full of hypocrisy, pride and arrogance. They are thus plagued by innumerable cares. They want fresh sensual pleasures every day. They are “ensnared

In nooses of a hundred idle hopes” (Arnold), and by unlawful means amass wealth in order to gratify their desires.

‘“I got this today; I will get that tomorrow. I killed this one enemy today; I will also kill others. I am a man of might. I have great possessions. Who is my equal? With a view to fame I will sacrifice to the gods, give alms and make merry”. They say this to themselves with a chuckle, and being caught in the net of delusion, go to hell at last.

‘Men with such a nature, given over to pride, speak ill of others and thus hate God who dwells in all hearts. They are therefore frequently born in the wombs of degraded parents.

‘There are three gates to hell, leading to the ruin of the soul: lust, anger and greed. Therefore we should



renounce them all. Turning aside from them, men go by the strait and narrow path and reach the highest state.

‘He who disregards the scriptures composed of eternal principles and gives himself up to pleasure cannot attain happiness or peace characteristic of the right way.

‘Therefore in deciding what you must do and what you must not do, you should acquire the knowledge of fundamental and immutable principles from wise men and think and act accordingly.’

### Chapter XVII

Arjuna asked, ‘What happens to those who serve in faith, neglecting the prevailing code of conduct?’

The Lord replied, ‘There are three kinds of faith, characterized by *sattva*, *rajas* or *tamas* as the case may be. As is a man’s faith, so is he.

‘*Sattvika* men worship the gods; *rajasa* men worship demigods and demons; and *tamasa* men worship the spirits of the dead.

‘The nature of a man’s faith cannot be ascertained offhand. In order to assess it correctly one must know the precise nature of his food, austerity, sacrifice and alms-giving.

‘Foods which make for long life and increase the vital force, energy, strength and health are said to be *sattvika*. *Rajasa* foods are violently bitter, sour, hot or pungent and give rise to disease and aches and pains. And cooked food which is stale or gives out a bad smell and the leavings of others are said to be *tamasa*.

‘The sacrifice which is offered as a matter of duty without expecting a reward and with mental concentration is said to be *sattvika*. A *rajasa* sacrifice is that in which a reward is desired and which is offered for outward show. And a *tamasa* sacrifice is one in which scriptural rules are disobeyed, no eatables or alms are given away and no hymns are chanted.

‘Honouring the saintly, purity, *brahmacharya* and non-violence constitute austerity of the body. Truthful, pleasant and beneficial speech as well as a study of the

scriptures is austerity of the speech. And cheerfulness, gentleness, silence, self-control and purity of motive—these are called the austerity of the mind. Such austerity of the mind, body and speech as is practised without desire of fruit by men with an evenness of temper is said to be *sattvika*. Austerity practised for ostentation and with a view to gaining honour is said to be *rajasa*. And austerity done by obstinate fools with self-torture or with the object of hurting others is said to be *tamasa*.

‘A gift “made in due place, due time and to a fit recipient” without expecting a reward and with a feeling that it is right for a man to give is said to be *sattvika*. A gift made grudgingly with a view to getting something in return is regarded as *rajasa*. And the gift which is given in a contemptuous spirit, and without honour done to the recipient and without considering the proper time and place for it is said to be *tamasa*.

‘Brahma is designated in the Vedas as *Om tat sat*. Therefore men of faith pronounce the sacred syllable *Om* when they commence any rite of sacrifice, alms-giving or austerity. This single syllable stands for Brahma. *Tat* means *that*. And *sat* means *satya*, beneficent. That is to say, God is one, He alone is, He alone is truth and the benefactor of the world. He who offers a sacrifice, makes gifts or practises austerity with a realization of this truth and in a spirit of dedication is a man of *sattvika* faith. And he is free from blame if he knowingly or unknowingly does something different from the correct procedure in the spirit of dedication. But acts undertaken in the absence of such a spirit are said to be performed without faith and therefore are *asat* (unreal).’

### Chapter XVIII

Even after he had pondered over the teaching in all the previous chapters, there was still a doubt in Arjuna’s mind. So he said, ‘The *sannyasa* of the Gita seems to be different from renunciation as currently understood. Are *sannyasa* and *tyaga* really different?’

While resolving Arjuna’s doubt in answer to this question, the Lord summarized the Gita doctrine in a concise



manner: 'Some actions are motivated by desire. Various activities are indulged in by men with a view to fulfil various desires. These are called *kamya* actions. Then again there are certain necessary and natural actions such as breathing, eating, drinking, lying down, sitting etc. with a view to keep the body a fit instrument of service. And thirdly there are actions done with a view to serve others. Giving up *kamya* actions is *sannyasa*, and renunciation of fruits of all actions is *tyaga* as recommended to you all along.

'Some people maintain that there is evil, no matter how little, in all actions whatever. Even so, a man must not give up actions done with a view to *yajna* (sacrifice), that is to say, the service of others. Alms-giving and austerity are included in *yajna*. But even while serving others, a man should act in a spirit of detachment. Otherwise his activity is likely to be mixed up with evil.

'Renunciation owing to ignorance of duties that must be done is said to be inspired by *tamas*. Giving up any action merely because it involves physical suffering is said to be *rajasa*. But service rendered to others because of a feeling that it must be done and without the desire for the fruits is real *sattvika tyaga*. In this *tyaga* therefore there is no giving up of all actions, but only of the fruit of duties that must be done, and of course of other, that is, *kamya* actions. When a wise man acts in such a selfless spirit, all his doubts are dispelled, his motives are pure and he has no thought of personal comfort and discomfort.

'He who does not abandon the fruits of action must enjoy or put up with the natural consequences of his own acts, and is thus a bond-slave for ever. But he who gives up the fruits of action achieves freedom.

'And why should man feel attachment for action? It is idle for anybody to imagine that he himself is a doer. There are five causes for the accomplishment of all actions, namely, this body, the doer, the various instruments, efforts, and last but by no means the least, providence.

'Realizing this, a man should give up pride. He who does something without egoism may be said to be not doing it in spite of his doing it, for he is not bound by his action. Of a humble man who has reduced himself to

zero it may be said that he does not kill though he kills. This does not mean that the man in spite of his humility may kill and yet be unaffected by the killing. For no occasion can arise for such a man to indulge in violence.

‘There are three things that inspire action: knowledge, the object of knowledge and the knower. And there are three constituents of action: the organ, the deed and the doer. The thing to be done is the object of knowledge; the method of doing it is knowledge and he who knows it is the knower. After he has thus received an impulse to action, he performs an action in which the senses serve as instruments. Thought is thus translated into action.

‘That by which a man is able

‘‘To see one changeless Life in all the lives’’

(Edwin Arnold)

and to realize the essential unity that underlies all diversities is *sattvika* knowledge. In *rajasa* knowledge one holds that there are different souls in different creatures, while in *tamasa* knowledge a man does not know a thing and imagines that everything is mixed up without rhyme and reason.

‘Similarly there are three kinds of action. Action in which there are no likes and dislikes and no desire for personal gains is *sattvika*. That in which there is a desire for enjoyment, egoism and restlessness is *rajasa* action. And *tamasa* action is one in which no thought at all is given to personal capacity and consequential injury or violence and which is undertaken through delusion.

‘So also there are three classes of doers. A *sattvika* doer is free from attachment and egoism and yet firm and enterprising and is neither elated by success nor worried by failure. A *rajasa* doer is impassioned, greedy and violent, ‘‘slave by turns of sorrow and of joy’’ (Edwin Arnold) and of course desires to obtain the fruit of his actions. And a *tamasa* doer is unsystematic, procrastinating, obstinate, malicious and indolent; in short, without an iota of self-culture.

‘Intellect, firmness and happiness also are said to be of three kinds.



'The *sattvika* intellect is able properly to distinguish between action and non-action,

"What must be done, and what must not be done,  
What should be feared, and what should not be feared,  
What binds and what emancipates the soul."

(Edwin Arnold)

The *rajasa* intellect tries to draw these distinctions but generally fails to do so correctly, while the *tamasa* intellect "looks upon wrong as right and sees all things contrariwise of truth" (Edwin Arnold).

'Firmness is the power of taking up some thing and sticking to it through thick and thin. It is more or less inherent in all things; otherwise the world could not subsist for a single moment. Firmness is *sattvika* when there is a constantly maintained balance between the activities of the mind, the vital airs (*pranas*) and the senses. The firmness by which a man holds fast to duty, pleasure and wealth from attachment and with a view to personal advantage is *rajasa*. And firmness is *tamasa*, "wherewith the fool

Cleaves to his sloth, his sorrow and his fears,

His vanity and despair." (Edwin Arnold)

'*Sattvika* happiness is the "pleasure that endures,

Banishing pain for aye, bitter at first

As poison to the soul, but afterwards

Sweet as the taste of Amrit."

(Edwin Arnold)

It arises from true self-knowledge.

'*Rajasa* happiness arises from sensual enjoyment.

"... Sweet

As Amrit is its first taste, but its last

Bitter as poison."

(Edwin Arnold)

'And *tamasa* happiness is that

"... which springs

From sloth and sleep and foolishness."

(Edwin Arnold)

'This threefold classification is thus applicable to all things. The duties of the four *varnas* (classes in ancient Hindu society) are fixed by reason of the dominance or recession of the qualities planted in each.

‘A Brahmana’s conduct is characterized by calmness, self-discipline, austerity, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, wisdom, experience and faith in God. The characteristics of a Kshatriya are valour, splendour, firmness, resourcefulness, not flying from battle, open-handedness and leadership. A Vaishya’s task is “to till the ground, tend cattle, venture trade” (Edwin Arnold), and service is the Shudra’s work. This is not to say that a member of any one of these classes may not be endowed with qualities characteristic of other classes or is not entitled to cultivate them in himself. But qualities and work as mentioned above serve as signs for the recognition of a man’s *varna*. If the qualities and tasks of each caste are recognized, there is no undesirable competition or feeling of hatred among them. There is no question here of high and low. But if each does his duty selflessly according to his nature, he will reach perfection. Therefore one’s own duty, though it appears to be valueless, is better than the duty of another which seems to be easy. A man may remain free from sin when he performs the task naturally allotted to him, as he is then free from selfish desires; the very wish to do something else arises from selfishness. For the rest, all actions are clouded by defects as fire by smoke. But the natural duty is done without desire for its fruit, and thus loses its binding force.

‘The calm yogi who has been sanctified by thus performing his own duty, who has his mind under control, who has given up the five sense objects, who has overcome likes and dislikes, who lives in solitude, i.e. whose eyes are turned inward, who achieves mastery of his mind, body and speech by abstemiousness, who is ever conscious of the living presence of God, and who has given up pride, desire, anger, acquisitiveness and the like,—that yogi is fit to be united with Brahma. He is equiminded towards all men. He neither rejoices nor indulges in grief. Such a devotee has true knowledge of God and is absorbed in Him. Thus taking refuge in Me, he gains the eternal place.

‘Therefore dedicate your all to Me, regard Me as the supreme object of your love, and with discrimination,



fix your mind on Me. As you do this, you will overcome all difficulties. But if out of egoism you do not listen to Me, you will perish. The one thing needful is that abandoning all conflicting views, you should come to Me alone for shelter, and thus be freed from sin.

‘Do not tell this truth to anyone who is not a devotee, austere in life, and hating Me, does not wish to listen. But one who communicates this great secret to My devotees will surely come to Me in virtue of his devotion.’

After having thus reported to Dhritarashtra the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, Sanjaya said,

‘Where there is Krishna, the prince of yoga, and Arjuna with his bow and arrows, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and fundamental morality.’

Krishna to whom the epithet ‘prince of yoga’ has here been applied means pure knowledge based on spiritual experience, and by referring to Arjuna as an archer it is suggested that where there is action in accordance with such knowledge, the doer obtains every wish that is not contrary to lofty morals.

## TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

### Chapter I

‘I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps. ... Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. Like the watch the heart needs the winding of purity; or else the Dweller ceases to speak’ (M. K. Gandhi: *Hindu Dharma*, Navajivan, 1950, p.156).

### Chapter II

‘English friends made me read the Gita.... They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold’s magnificent rendering of the Gita. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it. The last nineteen verses of the second chapter have since been inscribed on the tablet of my heart. They contain for me all knowledge. The truths they preach are the “eternal verities.”...

‘Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the Gita’ (ibid., p. 152).

‘The message of the Gita is to be found in the second chapter where Krishna speaks of the balanced state of mind, of mental equipoise. In nineteen verses at the close he explains how this state can be achieved. It can be achieved, he tells us, after killing all your passions. It is not possible to kill your brother after having killed all your passions’ (ibid., p. 179).

‘I have endeavoured to show that its message consists in the performance of one’s duty with detachment. The theme of the Gita is contained in the second chapter and the way to carry out the message is to be found in the third chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed every one of them has a merit of its own.

‘I hope that those who take part in the...celebration [of Gita-jayanti] will approach it in the proper spirit and with a fixed intention to live up to the message of the noble song’ (ibid., p. 182).

A fittingly anonymous article in *The Times* of November 17, 1956 will serve as a fine commentary on the Gita doctrine:

‘In the collect for tomorrow (the twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity) prayer is offered that those who “bring forth the fruit of good works” may be “rewarded by God.” There seems to be a conflict between morality and religion at this point. For while the former is emphatic that good actions must be done without the thought of reward and makes its motto “duty for duty’s sake”, the latter insists that God makes a distinction between good and evil, so that one meets with his approval while the other is condemned, and uses to express this the common language of reward and punishment.

‘Did not Jesus himself ask, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” Yet his life is clear evidence that the only service of God he valued was one that is free from any taint of self-interest. His fidelity was unshaken even when it became clear that it would lead him to abandonment by his friends and death at the hands of his enemies. The cross is a reminder that devotion to God and love to man, if they are rewarded at all, must find their reward elsewhere than in popular approval or material advantage.

‘What then are the rewards of which the collect speaks? The answer is to be found in the words: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The reward of service is not something attached to the service to make it worthwhile; it is of the same order as the service



itself. Inner dedication to God leads to admission into his fellowship and deeper knowledge of his will: the love of God makes possible an ever closer likeness to him. The vision of God, the enrichment of one's whole being, the joy of co-operation with Him in the enterprises of His kingdom—these are the rewards that God bestows on his servants.

'Yet that is not all. While it is true that the primary rewards to the life of the spirit are in the realm of the spirit, it is also true that character and uprightness may bring substantial advantages at a lower level. There have been cases in which public opinion has rallied to a leader just because he was known to be entirely honest and disinterested, giving him power and office that it would not entrust to a meaner person. To be scrupulously fair and absolutely reliable in business may bring advantages that do not fall to the lot of those who think only in terms of immediate profit.

'Not, of course, that action is to be for such gains. The maxim that "honesty is the best policy" is a dangerous one. He who chooses honesty for the returns it yields may be tempted to abandon it when circumstances arise in which it looks likely to be unprofitable. The paradox is that a virtue such as honesty leads to esteem and success when it is practised for its own sake, without any thought either of esteem or of success. Religion and morality are alike injured by any appeal to self-interest; the reward God gives is the vision of Himself, and this is for those only who serve Him without thought of what will be lost and what will be gained thereby.

'Perhaps this paradox that the rewards of God's service are for those only who serve him with no thought of reward lies behind the saying of Jesus that he who would save his life will lose it while he who is prepared to lose it will find that he has in fact preserved it. God receives into the choicest company of His servants those who follow truth and right simply because they are truth and right, and do not ask what the outcome of their fidelity will be. In the great words of Ignatius Loyola, they labour and do not ask for any reward save that of knowing that they do God's will.'

## Chapter XII

Whenever I meet any one who knows the Gita by heart, he or she commands my respect....I would, however like the reciters to realize that the mere recitation is not an end in itself. It should be an aid to the contemplation and assimilation of the meaning and the message of the Gita. By patience even a parrot can be taught to recite it

by heart. But he would be no wiser for the recitation. The reciter of the Gita should be what its author expects him to be—a yogi in its broad sense. It demands from its votaries balance in every thought, word and deed and a perfect correspondence between the three. He whose speech and action do not accord with his thoughts is a humbug or a hypocrite' (ibid., pp. 170-1).

'Devotion is not mere lip-worship; it is a wrestling with death....

'[It] is no soft-hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. [It] has the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries and forehead marks or make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion....

'The popular notion of [devotion] is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service lest the telling of beads might be interrupted. This [devotee] therefore leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

'But the Gita says, "no one has attained his goal without action..." ' (ibid., pp. 160-1, paragraphs 9, 10, 13).

In Vrindavan Shri Krishnaprem saw a *vaishnava* dying of typhoid. All round, coming and going were *vaishnavas* with rosaries in their hands, but there was no one to give him even a glass of water. 'What can be the value of such worship as this?' he asked. See his *The Search for Truth*, p. 26.



## VII. HINDU REFORMIST MOVEMENTS

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### BRAHMO SAMAJ'S CONTRIBUTION TO HINDUISM

(Speaking on the 20th August at the Ahmedabad Prarthana Samaj on the occasion of the celebration of the centenary of the foundation of the Brahmo Samaj, Gandhiji delivered an address of which the following is a condensed translation. —M. D.)

I do not think I am at all fitted to say anything on this great occasion, but I consented to come because of the great esteem in which I held the late Ramanbhai and because I could not resist Shrimati Vidyagauri. I am unfit to say anything today for many reasons. I have read nothing of or about Raja Ram Mohan Rai. What I know about him is based on what I have heard from his admirers. I do not claim to have studied the history of the Brahmo Samaj either. I made a desperate effort to read something today, something from a brochure on Ram Mohan Rai that we have in our library, but I could not find a moment for it. I therefore contented myself with the prayer that God might give me the right word to acquit myself of the task.

Although, then, I cannot claim to have studied the history of the Brahmo Samaj, I do claim to have a close connection with the members of the Brahmo Samaj extending over several years. It dates as far back as 1896 when I first visited Calcutta. In 1901 I came in contact with several eminent members of the Brahmo Samaj through Gokhale and Dr. P. C. Ray. I used to visit occasionally the Samaj Mandir, and listen to the sermons of the late Pratap Chandra Mozumdar. I also came in touch with the late Pandit Shivanath Shastri.

These experiences were enough to convince me that the Brahmo Samaj has rendered a great service to Hinduism, and that it has rescued the educated classes of India,

especially Bengal, from unbelief. I have always regarded it as a movement essentially designed for the educated classes. Though religion in India sometimes takes the form of superstition, wooden formalism and hysterics, I cannot escape the conviction that a man cannot long remain an unbeliever in India. But the faith of the educated class in the early part of the nineteenth century was in danger and it was Ram Mohan Rai who came to their rescue. I have heard that he had come under the influence of Christian missionaries and Kakasaheb told me that he had made a deep study of Persian and Arabic. There can be no question about his scholarship or about his catholicity. He made a deep study of Hinduism, especially the religion of the Vedas, and then allowed himself to be influenced by the essential principles of Christianity and Islam. As a result he saw that there was for him no escape from inaugurating a new movement to liberalize the existing Hinduism which had been overgrown with superstitious weeds. Sacrifice of animals and social evils were flourishing in the name of Hinduism. How could the educated class tolerate it? It was open to Ram Mohan Rai to rest content with individual dissociation from the evils. But he was a reformer. He could not afford to hide his light under a bushel, he gave public expression to his views, secured a following and founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828.

But it would have languished, had not a man of great spiritual gifts like Maharshi Devendranath Tagore joined it. It is for the future historian to estimate the Tagores' contribution to the intellectual and spiritual life of Bengal, India and even the world. Ravindranath Tagore's contribution in the direction has been stupendous. We cannot adequately estimate it, even as men living in the valleys of the Himalayas cannot adequately visualize their sublimity. And the Tagores received their inspiration from the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj liberated reason, and left room enough for faith. There was once a danger of the Brahmo Samaj severing its tie with Hinduism or the religion of the Vedas but the Maharshi's *tapasya* and knowledge rescued the Brahmo Samaj from that catastrophe. It is due to him that the Samaj remained part of Hinduism.



One may not measure the contribution of the Brahmo Samaj from the number of its adherents. The Brahmos are indeed very few but their influence has been great and good. The service of the Brahmo Samaj lies in its liberalizing and rationalizing Hinduism. It has always cultivated a toleration for other faiths and other movements, it has tried to keep the fountain source of religion pure and to hold up the ideal of pure worship of the Supreme Being.

Not that there is nothing for me to criticize in the Samaj but this is not the occasion for it. My desire is to place before you whatever is best in the Brahmo Samaj. Let this celebration awaken the religious instinct in you. True religion is not narrow dogma. It is not external observance. It is faith in God, and living in the presence of God, it means faith in a future life, in truth and Ahimsa. There prevails today a sort of apathy towards these things of the spirit. Our temples appear today to be meant only for the simple and the ignorant. Few visit real temples of God. Let the educated class take up the work of reform in this direction.

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I am inundated with letters from young men who write frankly about their evil habits and about the void that their unbelief has made in their lives. No mere medical advice can bring them relief. I can only tell them that there is no way but that of surrender to and trust in God and His grace. Let us all utilize this occasion by giving the living religion in our lives the place it deserves. Has not Akhobhagat said,

Live as you will, but so  
As to realize God.

*Young India*, 30-8-'28, p. 291

## ARYA SAMAJ

(From "Hindu-Muslim Tension—Its Cause and Cure")

Shraddhanandji is intrepid and brave. Single-handed he turned a wilderness into a magnificent boarding college on the banks of the sacred Ganges. He has faith in himself and his mission. But he is hasty and easily ruffled. He inherits the traditions of the Arya Samaj. I have profound respect for Dayanand Saraswati. I think that he has rendered great service to Hinduism. His bravery was unquestioned. But he made his Hinduism narrow. I have read *Satyartha Prakash* the Arya Samaj Bible. Friends sent me three copies of it whilst I was resting in the Yeravda Jail. I have not read a more disappointing book from a reformer so great. He has claimed to stand for truth and nothing less. But he has unconsciously misrepresented Jainism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism itself. One having even a cursory acquaintance with these faiths could easily discover the errors into which the great reformer was betrayed. He has tried to make narrow one of the most tolerant and liberal of the faiths on the face of the earth. And an iconoclast though he was, he has succeeded in enthroning idolatry in the subtlest form. For he has idolized the letter of the Vedas and tried to prove the existence in the Vedas of everything known to science. The Arya Samaj flourishes in my humble opinion not because of the inherent merit of the teachings of *Satyartha Prakash* but because of the grand and lofty character of the founder. Wherever you find Arya Samajists, there is life and energy. But having the narrow outlook and a pugnacious habit they either quarrel with people of other denominations and failing them, with one another. Shraddhanandji has a fair share of that spirit. But in spite of all these drawbacks, I do not regard him as past praying for. It is possible that this sketch of the Arya Samaj and the Swamiji will anger them. Needless to say, I mean no offence. I love the Samajists for I have many co-workers from among them. And I learnt



to love the Swamiji, even while I was in South Africa. And though I know him better now, I love him no less. It is my love that has spoken.

*Young India*, 29-5-'24, p. 173 at p. 178

## 114

## AN ARYA SAMAJ PROTEST

(Appeared in "Notes")

I have received the following wire from Agra Arya Samaj:

"Agra enters emphatic protest against strictures made by you regarding Arya Samaj, Rishi Dayanand, Swami Shraddhanandji, *Satyartha Prakash* and *shuddhi* movement which it trusts have been made unconsciously because of lack of full acquaintance with Arya Samaj teachings. Respectfully prays you to reconsider your views and remove misgivings likely to be produced."

I publish the telegram as I am sure the Agra Samaj represents a considerable body of Arya Samaj opinion. All I can say in reply is that I have not written a single word in the reference to the Samaj or Rishi Dayanand or Swami Shraddhanandji without deep consideration. It was easy enough for me to suppress my opinion. But consistently with truth I could not do so when it became relevant. Hindu-Muslim tension is a grim reality. Removal of it is a stern national necessity. It cannot be brought about by ignoring or suppressing facts. Truth on such occasions must be told no matter how unpalatable it may be. But I claim no infallibility. And yet I have seen nothing to revise my views. I cannot plead ignorance. I claim to have read *Satyartha Prakash*. I have the privilege of knowing Shraddhanandji intimately. My writing therefore is deliberate. But if any Arya Samajist can convince me that I have erred in any single particular, I shall gladly confess my error, apologize and withdraw the erroneous statement.

*Young India*, 5-6-'24, p. 185

## THE ARYA SAMAJISTS

A storm of indignation on the part of Arya Samajists is blowing against me. I have letters and telegrams of energetic protest against my references to the Samaj, its illustrious founder, Swami Shraddhanandji and the *shuddhi* movement. They are from Ghaziabad, Multan, Delhi, Sukkur, Karachi, Jagraon, Secunderabad, Lahore, Sialkot, Allahabad, etc. I omit mention of individual letters. Probably all of them expect me to publish their protests; some have specially insisted upon my doing so. They will forgive me for not complying with their desire. The majority are worded after the fashion of the telegram I reproduced last week. All resent what they regard as an attack upon the Arya Samaj, the *Satyartha Prakash*, Rishi Dayanand, Swami Shraddhanandji and the *shuddhi* movement. I am sorry to have to say that my position still remains unaltered. I have read with careful attention the argumentative correspondence received by me. Those who have attributed my statement to my ignorance have done so probably to leave me an open door for a safe retreat. Unfortunately for me, I have left no such chance for myself. I cannot plead ignorance of the *Satyartha Prakash* or the general teachings of the Arya Samaj. I cannot even say that I might have been prejudiced against the Arya Samaj. On the contrary, I approached it with the greatest veneration. I had, as I still have, profound regard for the personal character of Rishi Dayanand. His *brahmacharya* was an object of emulation for me. His fearlessness commanded my admiration. And my provincialism, if I have any in me, was flattered by the fact of the Rishi being of the same little Kathiawad as myself. But I could not help myself. The conclusion I came to in spite of myself, and I published it only when its publication became relevant. Its suppression would have been a cowardly omission on my part. Instead of becoming enraged against me for an honest expression of opinion, I appeal to them to take my



criticism in good part, examine it, try to convince me and pray for me if I cannot be convinced. Two letters have challenged me to substantiate my conclusion. It is a fair challenge and I hope before long to produce from the *Satyartha Prakash* passages in its support. My friends will not engage me in a religious discussion with them. I shall content myself with giving them the grounds of my opinion. So far as Swami Shraddhanandji is concerned there is no question of substantiating my opinion. My critics will oblige me by leaving him and me to ourselves. In spite of my opinion I will not quarrel with the Swamiji. Mine is the criticism of a friend. As for *shuddhi* the critics in their blind fury have forgotten the qualification 'as it is understood in Christianity or to a lesser extent in Islam'. This is quite different from saying that there is no proselytism in Hinduism. Hinduism has a way all its own of *shuddhi*. But if the Arya Samajists differ from me they may still allow me to retain my opinion. If they will reread the statement, they will discover that I have said that they have a perfect right to carry on their movement if they like. Toleration is not a coinciding of views. There should be toleration of one another's views though they may be as poles asunder. . . .

Let me point out to Arya Samaj friends that their protests betray want of toleration. Public men and public institutions cannot afford to be thin-skinned. They must stand criticism with good grace.

And now for an appeal to them. They have almost all entered their protests. I do not mind them. I assure them that I share their sorrow. It pained me when I wrote my criticism. It pains me now to know that it has hurt them. But I am not their enemy. I claim to be their friend. Time will prove my friendship. They do not want to quarrel with anybody or any faith. That is what almost all have said in their letters. Let them take to heart the tribute I have paid to the Samaj, its founder and to Swami Shraddhanandji. I know the purifying work that the Arya Samaj has done. I know that it has laid its finger on many abuses that have soiled Hinduism. But no one can live on his capital. I want them to outlive the latter and extend the spirit of their

reform. In spite of their denial I repeat that their *shuddhi* propaganda savours of the Christian propaganda. I would like them to rise higher. If they will insist upon reform from within, it will tax all their energy and take up all their time. Let them Hinduize the Hindu if they believe with me that Arya Samaj is a part of Hinduism. If they consider it as distinct from Hinduism, I fear it will be a hard task for them to convert the Hindus. Let them ascertain where they stand. I have criticized because I want them to help the great national and religious movement that is now going on. The Samaj has a great future if it can outgrow what has appeared to me its narrowness. If the Samajists think there is no room for expansion I shall feel sorry. I ask them in that case not to be irritated because I cannot see their liberalism. They should charitably overlook my blindness and patiently endeavour to remove it.

*Young India*, 12-6-'24, p. 196

# 116

## SWAMI SHRADDHANANDJI

(The following passages are culled out from an obituary by Gandhiji which was published under the title "The Martyr".)

The expected has happened. Swami Shraddhanandji passed a day or two at the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati, now about six months ago, and told me in the course of his conversations that he often received letters threatening his life. Where is the reformer who has not a price put upon his head? There was, therefore, nothing untoward in his getting the letters. And there is nothing untoward in the assassination having taken place.

Swamiji was a reformer, he was a man of action, not of words. He was a living belief. He has suffered for it. He was bravery personified. He never quailed before danger. He was a warrior, and a warrior loves to die, not on a sick-bed but on the battle-field.

Shraddhanandji became seriously ill about a month ago. Dr. Ansari was, as his physician, giving him all the loving attention he was capable of giving. The telegram I



received from his son, Indra, in reply to my inquiry at the beginning of the month, was that he was better and that he wanted my love and prayer, both of which he had before the asking.

God had willed for him a martyr's death and so, though he was still on the sick-bed, he died at the hands of an assassin who had asked to be admitted to the Swamiji's presence for the purpose of holding a religious discourse on Islam, who was admitted at the Swamiji's instance, and who, under pretence of wanting water to quench his thirst, had Swamiji's faithful servant, Dharamsingh, sent out to fetch water, and who, in the absence of the servant, deposited two death wounds in the patient's breast, as he was lying in his bed. We have not the last words of Swamiji, but if I knew him at all, I know that he prayed to his God to forgive him who knew not that he was doing anything wrong. In the language of the Gita 'happy the warrior who achieves such a blessed death.'

Death is at any time blessed, but it is twice blessed for a warrior who dies for his cause, that is, truth. Death is no fiend, he is the truest friend. He delivers us from agony. He helps us against ourselves. He ever gives us new chances, new hopes. He is like sleep, a sweet restorer. Yet it is customary to mourn when a friend dies. The custom has no operation when the death is that of a martyr. I cannot mourn over his death. He and his are to be envied. For though Shraddhanandji is dead, he is yet living. He is living in a truer sense than when he moved about in our midst in his giant body. The family in which he was born, the nation to which he belonged are to be congratulated upon so glorious a death as this. He lived a hero. He has died a hero.

*Young India*, 30-12-'26, p. 458

## SECTION FIVE: SIKHISM AND JAINISM

117

### SIKHISM AND HINDUISM

#### I

During his visit to Patna for the A.I.C.C. Sardar Mangal Singh drew my attention to an article in *Young India* entitled "My Friend the Revolutionary" in the issue dated 9th April last. He told me that many Sikh friends were offended because they thought I have described Guru Govind Singh as a misguided patriot whereas I had glorified Krishna. The Sardarji asked me to take an early opportunity of explaining what I meant by the passages he drew my attention to. The careful reader will note that my language is most guarded. I have made no positive assertion. All that I have said is that believing every statement made about the heroes mentioned including Guru Govind Singh to be true, had I lived as their contemporary I would have called everyone of them a misguided patriot. But in the very next sentence I have hastened to add that I must not judge them and that I disbelieve history as far as the details of the acts of the heroes are concerned. My belief about the Sikh Gurus is that they were all deeply religious teachers and reformers, that they were all Hindus and that Guru Govind Singh was one of the greatest defenders of Hinduism. I believe too that he drew the sword in its defence. But I cannot judge his actions, nor can I use him as my model so far as his resort to the sword is concerned. What I would have done had I lived in his times and held the same views that I hold now I do not know. Such speculation I regard as perfect waste of time. I do not regard Sikhism as a religion distinct from Hinduism. I regard it as part of Hinduism and the reformation in the same sense that Vaishnavism is. I read in the Yeravda prison all the writings that I could lay my hands upon regarding the Sikhs. I read portions



of Granth Saheb. Its deeply spiritual and moral tone I found to be uplifting. In the collections of hymns we have at the Ashram, we have some of Guru Nanak's also. At the same time I do not quarrel with the Sikhs for considering, if they wish, Sikhism as totally distinct from Hinduism. And when during my first visit to the Punjab a few Sikh friends told me that my reference to Sikhism as part of Hinduism displeased them, I ceased to refer to it as such. But the Sikh friends will pardon me for avowing my belief when I am asked to express my opinion about Sikhism.

Now about Krishna. Whilst I have dealt with the Gurus as historical personages about whose existence we have trustworthy records, I have no knowledge that the Krishna of Mahabharata ever lived. My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person. I would refuse to bow my head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride is hurt, or the Krishna whom non-Hindus portray as a dissolute youth. I believe in Krishna of my imagination as a perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the Gita and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. But if it was proved to me that the Mahabharata is history in the same sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the Mahabharata is authentic and the Krishna of the Mahabharata actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God incarnate. But to me the Mahabharata is a profoundly religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves given so vividly as to make us think for the time being that the deeds described therein were actually done by the human beings. Nor do I regard the Mahabharata as we have it now as a faultless copy of the original. On the contrary I consider that it has undergone many amendments.

*Young India*, 1-10-'25, p. 336

## II

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

He (Gandhiji) personally did not see any difference between Sikhism and Hinduism. They were varieties of the same faith. When he read the Granth Saheb written in *Devanagari* characters, he had not much difficulty in following the language. The thought in the various *bhajans* of Nanak Saheb and other *Gurus* were derived from the Vedas and the Puranas. But he did not mind the Sikhs regarding themselves as distinct from the Hindus.

*Harijan*, 13-7-'47, p. 232 at p. 233

118

## ARE SIKHS HINDUS?

(From "Notes")

Commenting on a letter\* from a correspondent from the Punjab, Gandhiji wrote:

I am very glad to find that Sikh friends resent my classing them with non-Hindus. I assure them that I had no such intention whatsoever. During my first tour in the Punjab, I happened to say in speaking of the Sikhs that in my opinion they were a part of the Hindu community. I did so, because I knew that millions of Hindus believed in Guru Nanak and that the Granth Saheb was filled with the Hindu spirit and Hindu legends. But a Sikh friend who was present at the meeting took me aside and said with the gravest concern that my inclusion of the Sikhs in the Hindu community had given offence, and the friend advised me in future never to speak of the Sikhs in the same breath as Hindus. During my tour in the Punjab I found that the caution given by the friend was well-given. For I noticed that many Sikhs regarded themselves as belonging to a religion distinct from Hinduism. I promised the friend never again to refer to the Sikhs as Hindus. Nothing would, therefore, please me better than to find that the separatist tendency is confined only to a very few Sikhs and that the general body regard themselves as Hindus. I have met with the same fate from

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\*Omitted from this collection.



Arya Samajists. An innocent reference to them as being part of Hindus, was also resented. One gentleman felt insulted when without the slightest intention of hurting his feelings I referred to him as a Hindu. I soothed him by immediate apology. I have not fared much better with some Jains. During my tour in Maharashtra, I found many Jains telling me that they were a community apart from Hindus. I have never understood the Jain objection, because there is so much that is common in Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism. I could somewhat understand the Arya Samaj objection because, the Samajists are, if one may say so without giving offence, fanatically hostile to idol-worship and Puranic literature and everything outside the Vedas and the Upanishads. But Jainism and Buddhism have so far as I know no such quarrel with Hinduism. Indeed Buddhism and Jainism are mighty reforms in Hinduism. Buddhism rightly insisted on internal purity. Its appeal went straight to the heart. It broke down arrogant assumption of superiority, Jainism represents the highest flight of logic. It has taken nothing for granted and has endeavoured to prove metaphysical truth by challenging the intellect. In my opinion we have hardly touched the vast literature these two reform movements have produced.

Holding the views I do, I hope my Sikh friends will appreciate the fact that if I have classed them as non-Hindus it is out of delicate regard for their feelings and against my own inclination.

*Young India*, 22-5-'24, p. 169 at p. 170

## 119

### GRANTH SAHEB

(From a speech of Gandhiji before a gathering of Sikhs of Delhi, a report of which appeared under the title "God and Our Bond")

I hold Granth Saheb in high reverence. Several parts of it have passed into our daily speech. So far as my reading of it goes it inculcates faith, valour and an invincible belief in the ultimate triumph of right and justice.

*Young India*, 19-3-'31, p. 42

## AN ADDRESS TO SIKHS ON GURU NANAK'S BIRTHDAY

(Some extracts from the address are reproduced below)

Today Bawa Bachittar Singh came to me in the morning and insisted that I should attend the Guru Nanak's birthday celebration. He told me that probably over a lac of men and women had assembled there, and that most of them would be sufferers from West Pakistan. I hesitated because I felt that many Sikhs had been displeased with me. Bawa Saheb nevertheless insisted and said that I would say my say before the meeting. I yielded and felt that even as a mother often gives bitter pills to her children, I would take the liberty of saying things, which might appear to be bitter. In reality and in effect they are meant for your good. My mother often used to administer bitter drugs, but I could not feel elsewhere the comfort that her lap provided for me. Whatever I have said to you up to now, I do not regret. I have said those things as your sincere friend and servant. I have with me Sardar Datar Singh's daughter. You perhaps know him. He has lost his all in East Punjab. He was the owner of large tracts of land and several hundred fine cattle. He has lost many relatives and dear friends in Montgomery, but I am glad to be able to tell you that he has not shed a single tear over the misfortune nor has he felt any bitterness towards the Muslims. I would like you to follow his example. Sikh friends have told me that one Sikh is considered equal to 1,25,000 men. Where is that bravery today? Have things come to such a pass that a minority of Muslims cannot live in your midst with perfect safety?

I am to admit that the mischief commenced in Pakistan, but the Hindus and the Muslims of East Punjab and the neighbouring districts have not been behindhand in copying the mischief. The difference is that the Hindus have not the courage of the Sikhs, who know how to use the sword.

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Let this auspicious day mark the beginning of a new chapter in your life. Let the disgrace of driving out the Muslims from Delhi cease from today. I found to my shame that as our motor-car was passing through Chandni Chowk, which used to be filled with the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims, I did not notice a single Muslim passer-by. Surely we have not come to such a pass as to be afraid of the minority of the Muslims scattered throughout the Indian Union. If there are any traitors in their midst, our Government is strong enough to deal with them. We must be ashamed of hurting children, women or old men. Every man must be considered innocent before he is found guilty by a properly constituted court of law.

I fervently hope that such misdeeds will become now a thing of the past. The *kirpan* is a symbol of sanctity to be exhibited and spent in defence of the helpless, and the innocent. The tenth and the last *Guru* undoubtedly wielded the sword, but never so far as I know, at the expense of the weak. He had imposed many restraints upon himself. He had many reputed Muslim disciples. So had the other *Gurus* beginning with Nanak Saheb. Your bravery will be testified when all those who belong to different faiths including Muslims become your sincere friends.

Intoxicating drinks, drugs, dancing, debauchery and the vices to which many of us become addicted are not for the followers of the *Gurus* and the Granth Saheb. With the Granth Saheb as my witness, I ask you to make the resolution that you will keep your hearts clean and you will find that all other communities will follow you.

*Harijan*, 7-12-'47, p. 449

## WHY THIS ANTIPATHY?

(From "Notes")

Q.: Simple-minded Jains take you for a Jain, and you are not ashamed to be regarded as such. And yet, you seem studiously to shun the very mention of Mahavira in the columns of *Harijan*. Is this becoming for a Mahatma like you?

A.: The above is the gist, in my own words, of a correspondent's question. The reader can infer from it, what the original must be like. I plead guilty to the charge of not being a Jain. But possibly I am a better informed devotee of Mahavira than many who claim to be Jains. If, however, I am not a devotee of Mahavira Swami, he or his devotees stand to lose nothing thereby. I alone will be the loser. I suggest that we merely betray our weakness when we resent the indifference of our neighbours about those whom we revere and idolize.

*Harijan*, 30-6-'46, p. 205



## SECTION SIX: BUDDHISM AND THEOSOPHY

122

### RELATION OF BUDDHISM TO HINDUISM

(A part of Gandhiji's speech in reply to Rangoon Corporation's address as reported in M. D.'s article entitled "With Gandhiji in Burma" is given below.)

Many Buddhists in Ceylon, as if by instinct, claimed me as their own, and in spite of my protestations that I was a Hindu of Hindus, they claimed me and I felt it an honour that they claimed me as one of their own. Undoubtedly, if the Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma, China and Japan would claim me as their own, I should appropriate that honour readily, because I know that Buddhism is to Hinduism what Protestantism is to Roman Catholicism, only in a much stronger light, in a much greater degree.

*Young India*, 28-3-'29, p. 97 at p. 99

123

### BHAGAWAN BUDDHA

(From "Recent Riots in Burma")

I have the greatest veneration for the Buddha. He is one of the greatest preachers of peace. The gospel of the Buddha is the gospel of love.

*Harijan*, 20-8-'38, p. 226

## THE MESSAGE OF BUDDHA

(Originally appeared under the title "Message to Buddhists")

The following is the text of the speech delivered by Gandhiji at Vidyodaya College, Colombo in reply to an address presented to him by the All Ceylon Congress of Buddhist Associations:

"I thank you very sincerely for the address that you have given to me. I appreciate the courtesy, in that you have supplied me with a translation of your address in advance. I am equally grateful to His Holiness and the priests for the benediction that they have pronounced just now. I shall always esteem it as a great privilege that I have received this benediction this afternoon, and I can give His Holiness and the priests in the presence of this Assembly the assurance that I shall always strive to deserve that benediction. . . .

### **Am I a Buddhist?**

"You do not know perhaps that one of my sons, the eldest boy accused me of being a follower of Buddha, and some of my Hindu countrymen also do not hesitate to accuse me of spreading Buddhistic teaching under the guise of Sanatana Hinduism. I sympathize with my son's accusations and the accusations of my Hindu friends. And sometimes I feel even proud of being accused of being a follower of the Buddha, and I have no hesitation in declaring in the presence of this audience that I owe a great deal to the inspiration that I have derived from the life of the Enlightened One. Indeed, at an anniversary celebration in the new Buddha Temple that has been erected in Calcutta I gave expression to this view. The leader in that meeting was Anagarika Dharmapala. He was weeping over the fact that he was not receiving the response that he desired for the cause which was close to his heart and I remember having rebuked him for shedding tears. I told the audience that though what passed under the name of Buddhism might have been driven out of India; the life of the Buddha and his teachings were



by no means driven out of India. This incident happened I think now three years ago, and I have seen nothing since to alter the view which I pronounced at that meeting. It is my deliberate opinion that the essential part or the teachings of the Buddha now forms an integral part of Hinduism. It is impossible for Hindu India today to retrace her steps and go behind the great reformation that Gautama effected in Hinduism. By his immense sacrifice, by his great renunciation and by the immaculate purity of his life he left an indelible impress upon Hinduism and Hinduism owes an eternal debt of gratitude to that great teacher. And if you will forgive me for saying so, and if you will also give me the permission to say so, I would venture to tell you that what Hinduism did not assimilate of what passes as Buddhism today was not an essential part of Buddha's life and his teachings.

### **Hinduism and Buddhism**

“It is my fixed opinion that Buddhism or rather the teaching of Buddha found its full fruition in India, and it could not be otherwise, for Gautam was himself a Hindu of Hindus. He was saturated with the best that was in Hinduism and he gave life to some of the teachings that were buried in the Vedas and which were overgrown with weeds. His great Hindu spirit cut its way through the forest of words, meaningless words, which had overlaid the golden truth that was in the Vedas. He made some of the words in the Vedas yield a meaning to which the men of his generation were utter strangers, and he found in India the most congenial soil. And wherever the Buddha went, he was followed by and surrounded not by non-Hindus but Hindus, those who were themselves saturated with the Vedic law. But the Buddha's teaching like his heart was all-expanding and all-embracing and so it has survived his own body and swept across the face of the earth. And at the risk of being called a follower of Buddha I claim this achievement as a triumph of Hinduism. Buddha never rejected Hinduism, but he broadened its base. He gave it a new life and a new interpretation. But here comes the point where I shall need your forgiveness and your generosity, and I want to submit to you that the teaching of Buddha was not assimilated

in its fulness whether it was in Ceylon, or in Burma, or in China or in Tibet. I know my own limitations. I lay no claim to scholarship in Buddhistic law. Probably, a Fifth Form boy from Nalanda Vidyalaya would plough me in a Buddhist catechism. I know that I speak in the presence of very learned priests and equally learned laymen, but I should be false to you and false to myself if I did not declare what my heart believes.

### **The Belief in God**

“You and those who call themselves Buddhists outside India have no doubt taken in a very large measure the teaching of the Buddha, but when I examine your life and when I cross-question the friends from Ceylon, Burma, China or Tibet, I feel confounded to find so many inconsistencies between what I have come to understand as the central fact of Buddha’s life and your own practice, and if I am not tiring you out, I would like hurriedly to run through three prominent points that just now occurred to me. The first is the belief in an all-pervading Providence called God. I have heard it contended times without number and I have read in books also claiming to express the spirit of Buddhism that Buddha did not believe in God. In my humble opinion such a belief contradicts the very central fact of Buddha’s teaching. In my humble opinion the confusion has arisen over his rejection and just rejection of all the base things that passed in his generation under the name of God. He undoubtedly rejected the notion that a being called God was actuated by malice, could repent of his actions, and like the kings of the earth could possibly be open to temptations and bribes and could possibly have favourites. His whole soul rose in mighty indignation against the belief that a being called God required for his satisfaction the living blood of animals in order that he might be pleased, animals who were his own creation. He, therefore, reinstated God in the right place and dethroned the usurper who for the time being seemed to occupy that White Throne. He emphasized and redeclared the eternal and unalterable existence of the moral government of this universe. He unhesitatingly said that the law was God Himself.



### What is Nirvana?

“God’s laws are eternal and unalterable and not separable from God Himself. It is an indispensable condition of His very perfection. And hence the great confusion that Buddha disbelieved in God and simply believed in the moral law, and because of this confusion about God Himself, arose the confusion about the proper understanding of the great word *nirvana*. *Nirvana* is undoubtedly not utter extinction. So far as I have been able to understand the central fact of Buddha’s life, *nirvana* is utter extinction of all that is base in us, all that is vicious in us, all that is corrupt and corruptible in us. *Nirvana* is not like the black, dead peace of the grave, but the living peace, the living happiness of a soul which is conscious of itself, and conscious of having found its own abode in the heart of the Eternal.

### Buddha’s Greatest Contribution

“The third point is the low estimation in which the idea of sanctity of all life came to be held in its travels outside India. Great as Buddha’s contribution to humanity was in restoring God to His eternal place, in my humble opinion greater still was his contribution to humanity in his exacting regard for all life, be it ever so low. I am aware that his own India did not rise to the height that he would fain have seen India occupy. But the teaching of Buddha, when it became Buddhism and travelled outside, came to mean that sacredness of animal life had not the sense that it had with an ordinary man. I am not aware of the exact practice and belief of Ceylonese Buddhism in this matter, but I am aware what shape it has taken in Burma and China. In Burma especially the Burmese Buddhists will not kill a single animal, but do not mind others killing the animals for them and dishing the carcasses for them for their food. Now, if there was any teacher in the world who insisted upon the inexorable law of cause and effect, it was inevitably Gautama, and yet my friends, the Buddhists outside India, would, if they could, avoid the effects of their own acts. But I must not put an undue strain upon your patience. I have but lightly touched upon some of

the points which I think it my duty to bring to your notice, and in all earnestness and equal humility I present them for your serious consideration.”

*Young India*, 24-11-'27, p. 392

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## A DIALOGUE WITH A BUDDHIST

(By M. D.)

### **The Meaning of Prayer**

Gandhiji had enough time to think and write during his recent visit to Abbottabad, especially as he was kept free of many engagements and interviewers. But even there he had some interviewers—not of the usual type interested in politics or topics of the day but of the unusual type troubled with ultra-mundane problems. History has it that discourses on such problems used to take place in this region hallowed of old by the steps of the followers of Buddha. One of the interviewers of Gandhiji described himself as a follower of Buddha, and discussed a problem arising out of his creed. He is an archaeologist and loves to live in and dream of the past. Dr. Fabri—for that is his name—has been in India for many years. He was a pupil of Prof. Sylvan Levy and came out as assistant to the famous archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein. He served in the Archaeological Department for many years, helped in reorganizing the Lahore Museum, and has some archaeological work to his credit. Delving deep in Buddhistic lore has turned him into a stark rationalist. He is a Hungarian and had in the past corresponded with Gandhiji and even sympathetically fasted with him. He had come to Abbottabad specially to see Gandhiji.

He was particularly exercised about the form and content of prayer and would very much like to know what kind of prayer Gandhiji said. Could the Divine Mind be changed by prayer? Could one find it out by prayer?

“It is a difficult thing to explain fully what I do when I pray,” said Gandhiji. “But I must try to answer your



question. The Divine Mind is unchangeable, but that Divinity is in everyone and everything—animate and inanimate. The meaning of prayer is that I want to evoke that Divinity within me. Now I may have that intellectual conviction, but not a living touch. And so when I pray for Swaraj or Independence for India I pray or wish for adequate power to gain that Swaraj or to make the largest contribution I can towards winning it, and I maintain that I can get that power in answer to prayer.”

“Then you are not justified in calling it prayer. To pray means to beg or demand,” said Dr. Fabri.

“Yes, indeed. You may say I beg it of myself, of my Higher Self, the Real Self with which I have not yet achieved complete identification. You may, therefore, describe it as a continual longing to lose oneself in the Divinity which comprises all.”

### **Meditation or Imploration?**

“And you use an old form to evoke this?”

“I do. The habit of a life-time persists, and I would allow it to be said that I pray to an outside Power. I am part of that Infinite, and yet such an infinitesimal part that I feel outside it. Though I give you the intellectual explanation, I feel, without identification with the Divinity, so small that I am nothing. Immediately I begin to say I do this thing and that thing I begin to feel my unworthiness and nothingness, and feel that someone else, some higher Power has to help me.”

“Tolstoy says the same thing. Prayer really is complete meditation and melting into the Higher Self, though one occasionally does lapse in imploration like that of a child to his father.”

“Pardon me,” said Gandhiji, cautioning the Buddhist doctor, “I would not call it a lapse. It is more in the fitness of things to say that I pray to God who exists somewhere up in the clouds, and the more distant He is, the greater is my longing for Him and find myself in His presence in thought. And thought as you know has a greater velocity than light. Therefore, the distance between me and Him,

though so incalculably great, is obliterated. He is so far and yet so near."

### **My Prayer not on a Different Level**

"It becomes a matter of belief, but some people like me are cursed with an acute critical faculty," said Dr. Fabri. "For me there is nothing higher than what Buddha taught, and no greater master. For Buddha alone among the teachers of the world said: 'Don't believe implicitly what I say. Don't accept any dogma or any book as infallible.' There is for me no infallible book in the world, inasmuch as all were made by men, however inspired they may have been. I cannot hence believe in a personal idea of God, a Maharaja sitting on the Great White Throne listening to our prayers. I am glad that your prayer is on a different level."

Let it be said in fairness to the Savant that he is a devotee of the Bhagavadgita and the Dhammapada, and those are the two scriptures he carries with him. But he was arguing an extreme intellectual position. Even here Gandhiji caught him from being swept into the torrent of his logic.

"Let me remind you," said Gandhiji, "that you are again only *partially* true when you say my prayer is on a different level. I told you that the intellectual conviction that I gave you is not eternally present with me. What is present is the intensity of faith whereby I lose myself in an Invisible Power. And so it is far truer to say that God has done a thing for me than that I did it. So many things have happened in my life for which I had intense longing, but which I could never have achieved myself. And I have always said to my co-workers it was in answer to my prayer. I did not say to them it was in answer to my intellectual effort to lose myself in the Divinity in me! The easiest and the correct thing for me was to say, 'God has seen me through my difficulty'."

### **Karma Alone Powerless**

"But that you deserved by your Karma. God is Justice and not Mercy. You are a good man and good things happen to you," contended Dr. Fabri.



“No fear. I am not good enough for things to happen like that. If I went about with that philosophical conception of Karma, I should often come a cropper. My Karma would not come to my help. Although I believe in the inexorable law of Karma I am striving to do so many things, every moment of my life is a strenuous endeavour, which is an attempt to build up more Karma, to undo the past and add to the present. It is therefore wrong to say that because my past is good, good is happening at present. The past would be soon exhausted, and I have to build up the future with prayer. I tell you Karma alone is powerless. ‘Ignite this match,’ I say to myself, and yet I cannot if there is no co-operation from without. Before I strike the match my hand is paralysed or I have only one match and the wind blows it off. Is it an accident or God or Higher Power? Well I prefer to use the language of my ancestors or of children. I am no better than a child. We may try to talk learnedly and of books, but when it comes to brass tacks—when we are face to face with a calamity—we behave like children and begin to cry and pray and our intellectual belief gives no satisfaction!”

### **Did not Buddha Pray?**

“I know, very highly developed men to whom belief in God gives incredible comfort and help in the building up of character,” said Dr. Fabri. “But there are some great spirits that can do without it. That is what Buddhism has taught me.”

“But Buddhism is one long prayer,” rejoined Gandhiji.

“Buddha asked everyone to find salvation from himself. He never prayed, he meditated,” maintained Dr. Fabri.

“Call it by whatever name you like, it is the same thing. Look at his statues.”

“But they are not true to life,” said the archaeologist questioning the antiquity of these statues. “They are 400 years later than his death,” said he.

“Well,” said Gandhiji, refusing to be beaten by a chronological argument, “give me your own history of

Buddha as you may have discovered it. I will prove that he was a praying Buddha. The intellectual conception does not satisfy me. I have not given you a perfect and full definition as you cannot describe your own thought. The very effort to describe is a limitation. It defies analysis and you have nothing but scepticism as the residue."

Was it of such people that Pope wrote?—

"With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,  
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest;  
In doubt to deem himself a god or beast;  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;  
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled,  
The glory, jest and riddle of the world."

### **Be Humble**

But to proceed, "What about the people who cannot pray?" asked Dr. Fabri.

"Be humble," said Gandhiji, "I would say to them, and do not limit even the real Buddha by your own conception of Buddha. He could not have ruled the lives of millions of men that he did and does today if he was not humble enough to pray. There is something infinitely higher than intellect that rules us and even the sceptics. Their scepticism and philosophy does not help them in critical periods of their lives. They need something better, something outside them that can sustain them. And so if someone puts a conundrum before me, I say to him, 'You are not going to know the meaning of God or prayer unless you reduce yourself to a cipher. You must be humble enough to see that in spite of your greatness and gigantic intellect you are but a speck in the universe. A merely intellectual conception of the things of life is not enough. It is the spiritual conception which eludes the intellect, and which alone can give one satisfaction. Even moneyed men have critical periods in their lives; though they are surrounded by everything that money can buy and affection can give, they find at certain moments in their lives utterly distracted. It is in these moments that we have a glimpse



of God, a vision of Him who is guiding every one of our steps in life. It is prayer."

"You mean what we might call a true religious experience which is stronger than intellectual conception," said Dr. Fabri. "Twice in life I had that experience, but I have since lost it. But I now find great comfort in one or two sayings of Buddha: 'Selfishness is the cause of sorrow', 'Remember, monks, everything is fleeting'. To think of these takes almost the place of belief."

"That is prayer," repeated Gandhiji with an insistence that could not but have gone home.

### **The Right to Kill Oneself**

Dr. Fabri found that it was impossible to take Gandhiji further on the point, but he stayed to ask yet another question. Buddha had excused monks who committed suicide. "What would you say to the right of man to dispose of his life? Life as life I hold of very little importance," he asked.

"I think," said Gandhiji, "that man has a perfect right to dispose of his life under certain circumstances. A co-worker suffering from leprosy knowing that his disease was incurable and that his life was as much an agony for those who had to serve him as it was for him, recently decided to end his life by abstaining from food and water. I blessed the idea. I said to him: 'If you really think you can stand the trial, you may do so.' I said this to him for I knew how different it is to die by inches from, say, suddenly killing oneself by drowning or poisoning. And my warning was fully justified, for some one tempted him with the hope that there was one who could cure leprosy, and I now hear that he has resumed eating and put himself under his treatment!"

"The criterion," said Dr. Fabri, "seems to me to be that if one's mind is completely obscured by pain, the best thing for him would be to seek *nirvana*. A man may not be ill but he may be tired of the struggle."

"No, no." said Gandhiji, correcting him as he was again running away with the thought that his view was identical with Gandhiji's. "My mind rejects this suicide.

The criterion is not that one is tired of life, but that one feels that one has become a burden on others and therefore wants to leave the world. One does not want to fly from pain but from having to become an utter burden on others. Otherwise one suffers greater pain in a violent effort to end one's agony. But supposing I have a cancer, and it is only a question of time for me to pass away, I would even ask my doctor to give me a sleeping draught and thereby have the sleep that knows no waking."

Dr. Fabri got up to go with the parting wish that there may be many more years of helpful activity left for Gandhiji.

"No," said Gandhiji with a hearty laugh, "according to you I should have no business to stay if I feel I have finished my task. And I do think I have finished mine!"

"No, I am convinced that you can serve humanity for many more years. Millions are praying for your life. And though I can neither pray nor desire anything—"

"Yes," said Gandhiji interrupting him, "the English language is so elastic that you can find another word to say the same thing."

"Yes," said Dr. Fabri, "I can unselfishly opine that you have many years before you."

"Well that's it. You have found the word! Here too let me tell you there is the purely intellectual conception of a man being unable to live. If he has not the desire to live, the body will perish for the mere absence of the desire to live."

As Dr. Fabri left he asked me if he might have Gandhiji's autograph. "I have long had a desire for it," he said, and contradicted himself as all votaries of sheer intellect must do. "Well," said I, "Gandhiji has never claimed to be free from desire, and with every autograph he gives he desires to secure Rs. 5/- for Harijans!" "I know," said Dr. Fabri, laughing, "it shall be given."

*Harijan*, 19-8-'39, p. 237



## MESSAGE TO THE FOONGIS

(The following message to the *foongis* of Burma is reproduced from "With Gandhiji in Burma—IV" by M. D.)

The real message to the *foongis* had been yet undelivered. Hundreds of monks met Gandhiji in Burma as in Ceylon, and nowhere did Gandhiji find an audience to draw him out. At one place there he rested satisfied with simply sounding a note of warning: "You who do well to own the Buddha as your teacher will do well to explore the limitless possibilities of non-violence. There are things in your practice which I have not been able to reconcile with the teachings of the Buddha but I do not propose to abuse your great hospitality by being critical at this moment." In Mandalay which is a great centre of pagodas and monasteries, thousands of *foongis* had gathered to meet Gandhiji, but the noise was so great that it was impossible to speak at any length and with any seriousness. "You have," he said, "as I conceive it, one of the greatest truths that the world can ever have uttered by one of the greatest teachers of mankind, viz., Ahimsa. If there had been a perfectly silent and a quiet atmosphere I would gladly have spoken to you upon that quiet doctrine. As it is I can only ask you to study the doctrine and reduce it to practice in every act of your lives. It is infinitely greater than the gems and the diamonds people prize so much. It can become, if you will make wise use of it, your own saving and the saving of mankind."

In Tongoo, however, which was the last place visited in Burma, there was unusual silence and quiet in the great pandal that they had constructed for the occasion, and the *foongis* had the privilege of a great interpreter in the person of Tharawady U Pu. I reproduce Tongoo speech *in extenso*.

"With this meeting ends what has been to me a most interesting and instructive tour in the interior of Burma. Delightful as my experiences of the people of Burma were

when my visit some years ago was only confined to Rangoon and for a day only to Moulemein, that delight has been heightened by my experience during this tour even as far as Mandalay. It has been a great joy to me to see at all these meetings so many yellow-robed *foongis* and so many Burman sisters and brothers. As this will be for many years to come, if not for ever, my last address to an audience such as this, I propose to submit a few remarks on what is to you and me dearest to our hearts.

It cannot be without purpose and meaning that all your addresses, no matter where presented, have approved of and blessed my message of non-violence and of the spinning wheel. I would, therefore, say a few words to you in explanation of what I understand by the message of Ahimsa. To me it is one of the most active forces in the world. It is like the sun that rises upon us unfailingly from day to day. Only if we would but understand it, it is infinitely greater than a million suns put together. It radiates life and light and peace and happiness. Why do we not see that light, that life, that peace and that happiness in a land that professes the law of Ahimsa? As I said in Mandalay only yesterday, it has appeared to me that the message of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, has only touched but the surface of the heart of Burma. I would like to apply one or two tests. Now I hold that where the law of Ahimsa reigns supreme, there should be no jealousy, no unworthy ambition, no crime. I read your criminal statistics and I find that you are not behindhand in the race for crime. Murder on the slightest pretext seems to me to be fairly common in Burma. I will, therefore, appeal to the friends on my left (the *foongis*) who are supposed to be the repositories of the Faith you have inherited from the Buddha. Having travelled in Ceylon and now fairly long enough in Burma, I feel that we in India have perhaps more fully, though by no means as fully as possible, interpreted the message of the Buddha than you have done. We have it in our Shastras that whenever things go wrong, good people and sages go in for *tapasya* otherwise known as austerities. Gautama himself, when he saw oppression,



injustice and death around him, and when he saw darkness in front of him, at the back of him and each side of him, went out in the wilderness and remained there fasting and praying in search of light. And if such penance was necessary for him who was infinitely greater than all of us put together, how much more necessary is it for us, no matter whether we are dressed in yellow or not?

My friends, if you will become torch-bearers lighting the path of a weary world towards the goal of Ahimsa, there is no other way out of it, save that of self-purification and penance. So many priests are sitting here today. If some of them will take upon themselves the work of interpreting the message of the Buddha, they will revolutionize life. You will not be guided by rigid traditions, but will search your hearts and your scriptures and tear the hidden meaning lying behind the written word and vivify your surroundings. You will then find upon searching your hearts that it is not enough not to take animal life, but you must see to it that it is not taken for the pleasures of the palate. You will then at once realize that it is inconsistent with the doctrine of love for all that lives to turn our mouths into chimneys. I understand that drink is on the increase in a people so simple-hearted as the Burmese and in a climate which does not necessitate the drinking of the fiery liquid. You will immediately see on further research that there is no room for one who loves everything that lives to have fear lurking in his breast. You will yourselves cease to fear authority and you will teach all round you to cease to fear anybody. I hope that these few words that I have spoken to you in all humility and from the bottom of my heart will be received by you in the same spirit in which they have been spoken. Since you have at all your meetings credited me with a spirit of non-violence and truth, I have endeavoured to interpret in the best way I could the message of non-violence and truth as I have understood it for an unbroken period of 40 years. May the words I have spoken find a lodgment in your heart and may they bear abundant fruit, and if they do, there should be no difficulty in all factions and parties combining together

for a common cause. I thank you for having listened to me with such patience and in perfect silence.

*Young India*, 18-4-'29. p. 125

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PLEA FOR BUDDHISTIC REVIVAL

Gandhiji addressed a large gathering in Ceylon of Buddhist young men on the premises of their association on the 25th November, 1927.

At the outset Gandhiji pleaded for toleration. He did not claim to be a scholar in any sense of the term. His first introduction to any religious study was through a single book, viz., Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia*, which fascinated and engrossed him. Ever since, the spirit of Buddha had haunted him, so much so that he had been accused of being a Buddhist in disguise. And as he had said on a previous occasion he accepted the accusation as a compliment though he knew that if he made any such claim it would be summarily rejected by orthodox Buddhists. As one, however, who had imbibed the spirit of Buddhism he would reassert in all humility, but unhesitatingly, if in a different language, what he said on the previous occasion.

"There are some conditions," he said, "laid down in Hinduism for a proper prayerful study of religions. They are of a universal character. Remember also that Gautama was a Hindu of Hindus. He was saturated with the spirit of Hinduism, with the Vedic spirit, he was born and bred up in those exhilarating surroundings—exhilarating for the spirit,—and so far as I am aware, he never rejected Hinduism, or the message of the Vedas. What he did was therefore to introduce a living reformation in the petrified faith that surrounded him. I venture to suggest to you that your study of Buddhism will be incomplete unless you study, the original sources from which the Master derived his inspiration, that is, unless you study Sanskrit and the Sanskrit scriptures. But your duty, if you are to understand the spirit of the Buddha and not the letter of Buddhism, does not end there. That study has those conditions which



I am about to describe to you. Those conditions are that a man or a woman who approaches the study of religion has first of all to observe what are called the five *yamas*. They are the five rules of self-restraint and I will repeat them before you. Firstly, *Brahmacharya*, celibacy; the second is *Satya*, truth; the third is *Ahimsa*, absolute innocence, not even hurting a fly; the next condition is *Asteya*, non-stealing, not merely, not stealing in the ordinary sense in which the word is understood, but if you appropriate or even cast your greedy eyes on anything that is not your own, it becomes stealing. Lastly, *Aparigraha*—a man, who wants to possess worldly riches or other things, won't be fit really to understand the spirit of the Buddha. These are the indispensable conditions. There are other conditions, but I am going into these, because these are the fundamental ones, and Gautama before he attained his knowledge had conformed to all these rules, and conformed, as few of his contemporaries had ever done, to the spirit of those rules. I humbly suggest to you that you will not understand the spirit of the Buddha unless you have also yourselves conformed to these rules and then prayerfully tried to ascertain what the Master meant. It makes no difference that you know of him through all the books that have been written, but even these very books, I make bold to assure you, you will understand and you will interpret with a new light immediately you have gone, first of all, through these preliminary observances. Look what many critics of Islam have done—how they have torn the very book, that millions of Musalmans swear by, to pieces and held up the teachings of Islam to scorn. They were not dishonest men who wrote this criticism, they were honest men, they were not men who were not trying to search the truth, but they did not know the conditions that they had to fulfil before they could make any religious study. Again look at what the critics of Hinduism have done. I read many of those criticisms, trying to enter into the spirit of the critics but came to the conclusion that they did not know the A.B.C. of Hinduism and that they were grossly misinterpreting Hinduism. Take Christianity itself. Many Hindus have misinterpreted Christianity. They approach

the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament in a carping spirit, with preconceived notions. But why talk of the Hindus? Have I not read books written by Englishmen who, pretending to consider themselves atheists, have turned the Bible upside down and put all the fiery writings into the hands of innocent men and women and thereby done grave injury to the simple people who read them? I have laid these points before the young men of this association, because I am anxious that you should be the pioneers of presenting Ceylon, and through Ceylon the world, with a real Buddhistic revival, that you should be the pioneers in presenting a living faith to the world, and not the dead bones of a traditional faith which the world will not grasp.

“The priests,” Gandhiji went on to say, “whom he had seen. . . said they could not argue but that they could only say what the Master taught. It is all right, but today the spirit of enquiry is abroad. We have got to deal with that spirit. The world is trying to seek the truth, and thirsting for peace in the midst of this terrible strife. There is also the desire for knowing the truth, but as I have ventured to suggest to you, those, who made a scientific study of religion and those who gave their lives for arriving at the truth and those with whose bones the snow of the Himalayas are whitened, have left these treasures not merely for 300 millions of India, but they have left those treasures for everyone who cares to understand them, and they have said, ‘We cannot deliver the truth to you.’ It is incapable of being delivered through writings, it is incapable of being delivered with the lips, it is capable of being delivered only through life. It transcends reason. But it is not past experience. So they said, ‘We tell you that such and such is the fact, but you will have to test it for yourselves. You will apply your reason, we do not want you to deaden your reason, but you yourselves, even as we, will come to the conclusion that reason which God has given is after all a limited thing, and that which is a limited thing will not be able to reach the limitless. Therefore, go through these preliminary conditions, even as when you want to study geometry or algebra, you have to go through



preliminary processes, however trying and tiresome. Observe them and then you will find that what we tell you with our own experience will be also yours.'

"I want to take you through only one illustration as to how the teaching of Buddha is now not being observed. I have retained this part of my talk up to almost the very last moment except that I hinted at it in my speech at the Vidyodaya College.

"You believe that Gautama taught the world to treat even the lowest creatures equal to himself. He held the life of even the crawling things of the earth as precious as his own. It is an arrogant assumption to say that human beings are lords and masters of the lower creation. On the contrary, being endowed with greater things in life, they are trustees of the lower animal kingdom. And the great sage lived that truth in his own life. I read as a mere youngster the passage in the *Light of Asia* describing how the Master took the lamb on his shoulders in face of the arrogant and ignorant Brahmanas who thought that by offering the blood of these innocent lambs they were pleasing God, and he dared them to sacrifice a single one of them. His very presence softened the stony hearts of the Brahmanas. They looked up to the Master, they threw away their deadly knives and every one of those animals was saved. Was this message given to the world in order to falsify it, as it is being falsified here? I feel that you who are the repositories of this great faith are not true to the spirit of the Master's teachings so long as you do not regard all animal creation as sacred, and you cannot do so, so long as you do not abstain from meat and delude yourselves into the belief that you are not guilty of the crime of that slaughter because some one else killed the animals for you. You entrench yourselves behind the wall of traditions. You say that the Master never prohibited meat-eating. I do not think so. If you would approach the teachings of the Master in the spirit indicated by me, and rub in the spirit of tradition, you will have a different vision and a different meaning. You will find that when the Master said, 'I do not prohibit you from meat-eating,' he was preaching to a people who were in Christian parlance hard of

hearts. It was because he wanted to make allowance for their weakness that he allowed them to eat it, and not because he did not know the logic of his own teaching. If animals could not be sacrificed to the gods above, how could they be sacrificed to the epicure in us? When he prohibited sacrifice he knew what he was saying. Did he not know that the animals were sacrificed to be ultimately eaten? Why do they sacrifice thousands of sheep and goats to the Goddess Kali in Calcutta, be it said to their discredit and the discredit of Hinduism in spite of having received this message from the Hindu of Hindus—Gautama? Do they throw the carcasses away in the Hoogly? No, they eat every bit of the meat with the greatest delight, thinking that it has been sanctified because of the presentation to Kali. So the Buddha said, 'If you want to do any sacrifice, sacrifice yourself, your lust, all your material ambition, all worldly ambition. That will be an ennobling sacrifice. May the spirit of the Buddha brood over this meeting and enable you to measure and assimilate the meaning of the words that I have spoken to you.'

*Young India*, 8-12-'27, p. 410

## MY VIEWS ON THEOSOPHY

(Originally appeared in the columns of "Notes" under the title "A Tissue of Misrepresentations")

If most newspapers in the world were to cease publication, the world will not lose anything. Probably, it will heave a sigh of relief. The newspapers generally give not facts but fiction. This reflection arises from my having read a so-called interview with me published in the *Messenger of America*. It is the official organ of the American Philosophical Society. Why even a philosophical society's organ should give currency to fiction in the name of fact is more than I can understand.

I should not have noticed this 'interview' but for the distortion it contains about my views of Theosophy.



I must, therefore, pass by the fiction that 'I was spinning on an old-fashioned loom', or 'that there were mango trees outside my room', or the worse fiction that 'it is through sympathy and understanding of America and the other great nations that we Indians gain the moral force to make our sacrifices'.

I must hasten to the Theosophical fictions. Among other things I am reported to have said that 'I am not in sympathy with Theosophical Movement', that 'I am still a Theosophist but I am not in sympathy with the movement'. This is just the opposite of what I could have said. For I am not and have never been a member of any Theosophical Society but I am and have ever been in sympathy with its message of universal brotherhood and consequent toleration. I owe much to theosophical friends among whom I have many. Whatever critics may say against Madame Balavatsky or Col. Olcott or Dr. Besant, their contribution to humanity will always rank high. What has been a bar to my joining the society, as the interview somewhat correctly puts, is its secret side—its occultism. It has never appealed to me. I long to belong to the masses. Any secrecy hinders the real spirit of democracy. But I recognize that there are two sides at least to every question. And there may be much to be said in favour of occultism in religion. Hinduism is certainly not free from it. But I am not called upon to subscribe to it.

I repeat the request I have often made to interviewers that if they must interview me or report anything about me they will do me a favour and serve truth, if they will submit to me for correction and verification all they wish to report as having been said by me.

*Young India*, 9-9-'26, p. 317

## SECTION SEVEN: CHRISTIANITY, M.R.A. AND ISLAM

129

### THE PERSONALITY OF JESUS

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Being asked by a Christian missionary what his attitude to the personality of Jesus was, Gandhiji replied: "I have often made it clear. I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, but I do not regard him as the only begotten son of God. The epithet in its material interpretation is quite unacceptable. Metaphorically we are all begotten sons of God, but for each of us there may be different begotten sons of God in a special sense. Thus for me Chaitanya may be the only begotten son of God."

The missionary then further asked: "But don't you believe in the *perfection* of human nature, and don't you believe that Jesus had attained perfection?"

Gandhiji replied: "I believe in the *perfectability* of human nature. Jesus came as near to perfection as possible. To say that he was perfect is to deny God's superiority to man. And then in this matter I have a theory of my own. Being necessarily limited by the bonds of flesh, we can attain perfection only after dissolution of the body. Therefore God alone is absolutely perfect. When He descends to earth, He of His own accord limits Himself. Jesus died on the Cross because he was limited by the flesh. I do not need either the prophecies or the miracles to establish Jesus' greatness as a teacher. Nothing can be more miraculous than the three years of his ministry. There is no miracle in the story of the multitude being fed on a handful of loaves. A magician can create that illusion. But woe worth the day on which a magician would be hailed as the Saviour of humanity. As for Jesus raising the dead to life, well I doubt if the men he raised were really dead. I raised a relative's child from supposed death to life, but that



was because the child was not dead and but for my presence there she might have been cremated. But I saw that life was not extinct. I gave her an enema and she was restored to life. There was no miracle about it. I do not deny that Jesus had certain psychic powers and he was undoubtedly filled with the love of humanity. But he brought to life not people who were dead but who were believed to be dead. The laws of Nature are changeless, unchangeable, and there are no miracles in the sense of infringement or interruption of Nature's laws. But we limited beings fancy all kinds of things and impute our limitations to God. We may copy God, but not He us. We may not divide Time for Him, Time for Him is eternity. For us there is past, present and future. And what is human life of a hundred years but less than a mere speck in the eternity of Time?"

*Harijan*, 17-4-'37, p. 85 at p. 87

## 130

### THE JESUS I LOVE

[During the past few days, questions have time and again been asked to Gandhiji about Christ and Christianity. Sometimes he has refused being drawn into them by simply giving monosyllabic replies, sometimes a reply like this: "Christianity is good, Christians are bad;" and sometimes by just a hypothetical reply.

A question for instance, was pointedly asked at the Paris meeting: "Why do you refuse to enter God's house if Jesus invites you? Why does not India take up the Cross?"

Gandhiji replied: "If Jesus has reference to God, I have never refused to enter the house of God; indeed every moment I am trying to enter it. If Jesus represents not a person, but the principle of non-violence, India has accepted its protecting power."

On the ship our evening prayers are being attended by a few Christian friends, and once Gandhiji was asked to give a talk on the Sermon on the Mount. "Don't ask

me to do anything of the kind," said he. "You may ask questions if you like, but don't ask me to make a set speech."

When the persistent Mr. Mills, of the Associated Press of America, pressed Gandhiji for a message of Christmas greetings for America, he dictated a sentence or two very reluctantly.

"I have never been able to reconcile myself to the gaieties of the Christmas season. They have appeared to me to be so inconsistent with the life and teaching of Jesus.

"How I wish America could lead the way by devoting the season to a real moral stock-taking and emphasizing consecration to the service of mankind for which Jesus lived and died on the Cross."

But on Christmas Day, or rather on the day before, came a request which Gandhiji could not refuse. Miss Barr, a missionary lady working in Hyderabad (Deccan) and Mr. Buel, from Ceylon, had been attending our prayers regularly, the former even attending the morning ones. Both had evinced an interest in the prayers which one could easily appreciate. When, therefore, the latter pressed for a Christmas message to be given by Gandhiji on Christmas Day, he had to consent.

"But the time?" asked Gandhiji.

"Whatever time is convenient to you." said Mr. Buel.

"Well, then 4 a.m." replied Gandhiji.

Mr. Buel was non-plussed.

"4-30 a.m., if you like," said Gandhiji.

"Very few would be able to come," pleaded Mr. Buel.

"It would be quite all right if only one or two attend," said Gandhiji.

"No," said Mr. Buel, "I will put up a notice."

"Please do nothing of the kind. Let those who expressed the desire come here at 4-30."

After considerable hesitation, Miss Barr and Mr. Buel agreed, and on Christmas Day quite half-a-dozen of them turned up at the appointed hour. There was a



hymn celebrating Christ's nativity,—“While shepherds watched their flocks by night”. Then there was a reading from the New Testament, and then a talk by Gandhiji, who spoke on the meaning Christmas Day had for him. I reproduce the talk practically verbatim. The hymn sung at the end was, “Take my life and let it be.”—M.D.]

I shall tell you how, to an outsider like me, the story of Christ, as told in the New Testament, has struck. My acquaintance with the Bible began nearly forty-five years ago, and that was through the New Testament. I could not then take much interest in the Old Testament, which I had certainly read, if only to fulfil a promise I had made to a friend whom I happened to meet in a hotel. But when I came to the New Testament and the Sermon on the Mount, I began to understand the Christian teaching, and the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount echoed something I had learnt in childhood and something which seemed to be part of my being and which I felt was being acted up to in the daily life around me.

I say it seemed to be acted up to, meaning thereby that it was not necessary for my purpose that they were actually living the life. This teaching was non-retaliation, or non-resistance to evil. Of all the things I read, what remained with me for ever was that Jesus came almost to give a new law—though He of course had said that He had not come to give a new law, but tack something on to the old Mosaic law. Well, He changed it so that it became a new law—not an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, but to be ready to receive two blows when one was given, and to go two miles when you were asked to go one.

I said to myself, this is what one learns in one's childhood. Surely this is not Christianity. For all I had then been given to understand was that to be a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. The Sermon on the Mount, however, falsified the impression.

As my contact with real Christians, i.e. men living in fear of God, increased, I saw that the Sermon on the Mount was the whole of Christianity for him who wanted

to live a Christian life. It is that Sermon which has endeared Jesus to me.

I may say that I have never been interested in a historical Jesus. I should not care even if it was proved by some one that the man called Jesus never lived, and that was narrated in the Gospels was a figment of the writer's imagination. For the Sermon on the Mount would still be true for me.

Reading, therefore, the whole story in that light, it seems to me that Christianity has yet to be lived, unless one says that where there is boundless love and no idea of retaliation whatsoever, it is Christianity that lives. But then it surmounts all boundaries and book-teaching. Then it is something indefinable, not capable of being preached to men, not capable of being transmitted from mouth to mouth, but from heart to heart. But Christianity is not commonly understood in that way.

Somehow, in God's providence, the Bible has been preserved from destruction by the Christians, so-called. The British and Foreign Bible Society has had it translated into many languages. All that may serve a real purpose in the time to come. Two thousand years in the life of a living Faith may be nothing. For though we sang, "All glory to God on High and on the earth be peace", there seems to be today neither glory to God nor peace on earth.

As long as it remains a hunger still unsatisfied, as long as Christ is not yet born, we have to look forward to Him. When real peace is established, we will not need demonstrations, but it will be echoed in our life, not only in individual life, but in corporate life. Then we shall say Christ is born. That to me is the real meaning of the verse we have sung. Then we will not think of a particular day in the year as that of the birth of Christ, but as an ever-recurring event which can be enacted in every life.

And the more I think of fundamental religion, and the more I think of miraculous conceptions of so many teachers who have come down from age to age and clime to clime, the more I see that there is behind them the eternal truth that I have narrated. That needs no label or



declaration. It consists in the living of life, never ceasing, ever progressing towards peace.

When, therefore, one wishes "A Happy Christmas" without the meaning behind it, it becomes nothing more than an empty formula. And unless one wishes for peace for all life, one cannot wish for peace for oneself. It is a self-evident axiom, like the axioms of Euclid, that one cannot have peace unless there is in one an intense longing for peace all round. You may certainly experience peace in the midst of strife, but that happens only when to remove strife you destroy your whole life, you crucify yourself.

And so, as the miraculous birth is an eternal event, so is the Cross an eternal event in this stormy life. Therefore we dare not think of birth without death on the Cross. Living Christ means a living Cross. Without it life is a living death.

*Young India*, 31-12-'31, p. 429

## 131

### JESUS CHRIST AND I

(One of the questions and answer thereto from an article entitled "A Student's Questions" are reproduced below.)

*Q.*: What is your attitude towards the teachings of Jesus Christ?

*A.*: They have an immense value for me, but I do not regard everything said in the Bible as the final word of God or exhaustive or even acceptable from the moral standpoint. I regard Jesus Christ as one of the greatest teachers of Mankind, but I do not consider him to be the 'only Son of God'. Many passages in the Bible are mystical. For me 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life'.

*Young India*, 25-2-'26, p. 77

## JESUS PREACHED NOT A NEW RELIGION BUT A NEW LIFE

(Originally appeared in columns of "Notes" under the title "The Social Bait")

A friend who has had occasion to study the work of the Salvation Army sends me the following interesting note:

"The Salvation Army is essentially a religious body with 'aggressive evangelism' as its main characteristic. The social work the Army does 'has from the first been regarded by the Army leaders as an organized warfare against social evils in order to clear the way for evangelization'. This is from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th edition). It further says that 'It was realized that the physical and the environmental condition of many of the people, especially in great cities, make it extremely difficult for them to apprehend the spiritual message which the Army had to deliver. Therefore various social activities arose, diverse in character but all actuated by the same purpose', and General Booth himself in one of his letters to his son has said that 'the social work is the bait, but it is salvation that is the hook that lands the fish'.

The object and the work of this Mission according to its founder is 'to seek the conversion of the neglected crowds of people who are living without God and without hope, and to gather those so converted into Christian fellowship'. It is also stated in the *Salvation Army Year Book* for 1937 that 'upon Salvationists everywhere was urged the importance of personal evangelism—that each one was responsible before God for the salvation of others. Personal touch, personal conversation, personal effort, it was pointed out, was of paramount importance, nay, was the duty of every wearer of our uniform'. Thus 'Every Soldier a Soul-winner' became and remains an inspiring slogan."

Of course what is true of the Army is more or less true of all Christian Missions. Their social work is undertaken not for its own sake but as an aid to the salvation of those who receive social service. The history of India would have been written differently if the Christians had



come to India to live their lives in our midst and permeate ours with their aroma if there was any. There would then have been mutual goodwill and utter absence of suspicion. But say some of them, 'If what you say had held good with Jesus there would have been no Christians.' To answer this would land me in a controversy in which I have no desire to engage. But I may be permitted to say that Jesus preached not a new religion but a new life. He called men to repentance. It was he who said, 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'

*Harijan*, 12-6-'37, p. 137.

## 133

## THE BIBLE

(From "The Week" by M. D.)

You ask me to give my interpretation of the life of Christ. Well, I may say that I do not accept everything in the Gospels as historical truth. And it must be remembered that he (the Christ) was working amongst his own people, and he said he had not come to destroy but to fulfil. I draw a great distinction between the Sermon on the Mount and the Letters of Paul. They are a graft on Christ's teaching, his own gloss apart from Christ's own experience.

*Young India*, 19-1-'28, p. 21

## RE-READ THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE

(From "Talks with Missionaries" by M. D.)

The second was a talk as well as a discussion with the missionaries of Bangalore. Whereas the first was an appeal to them to take up his work, the second was an attempt to offer a corrective to their attitude towards the people they claimed to serve. Gandhiji opened the discussion by claiming himself to be a friend of the missionaries, ever since his close contact with them in South Africa. 'Though I have been a friend, I have always been a critic, not from any desire to be critical, but because I have felt that I would be a better friend if I opened out my heart, even at the risk of wounding their feelings. They never allowed me to think that they felt hurt, they certainly never resented my criticism.' Then he referred to his first speech before the missionaries in India on Swadeshi, since which twelve years had rolled away and with them much of the mists also.

'The first distinction I would like to make, after these prefatory remarks, between your missionary work and mine, is that while I am strengthening the faith of the people, you are undermining it. Your work, I have always held, will be all the richer if you accept as settled facts the faiths of the people you come to serve,—faiths which, however crude, are valuable to them. And in order to appreciate what I say, it becomes perhaps necessary to re-read the message of the Bible in terms of what is happening around us. The word is the same, but the spirit ever broadens intensively and extensively, and it might be that many things in the Bible will have to be re-interpreted in the light of discoveries—not of modern science—but in the spiritual world in the shape of direct experiences common to all faiths. The fundamental verses of St. John do require to be re-read and re-interpreted. I have come to feel that like us human beings words have their evolution from stage to stage in the contents they hold. For instance the contents



of the richest word—God—are not the same to every one of us. They will vary with experience of each. They will mean one thing to the Santhal and another to his next-door neighbour Rabindranath Tagore. The Sanatanist may reject my interpretation of God and Hinduism. But God himself is a long-suffering God who puts up with any amount of abuse and misinterpretations. If we were to put the spiritual experiences together, we would find a resultant which would answer the cravings of human nature. Christianity is 1900 years old, Islam is 1300 years old; who knows the possibility of either? I have not read the Vedas in the original, but have tried to assimilate their spirit and have not hesitated to say that, though the Vedas may be 13,000 years old,—or even a million years old, as they well may be, for the word of God is as old as God Himself,—even the Vedas must be interpreted in the light of our experience. The powers of God should not be limited by the limitations of our understanding. To you who have come to teach India, I, therefore say, you cannot give without taking. If you have come to give rich treasures of experiences, open your hearts out to receive the treasures of this land, and you will not be disappointed, neither will you have misread the message of the Bible.’

Interesting questions and answers followed which I summarize below:

Q.: What then are we doing? Are we doing the right thing?

A.: You are trying to do the right thing in the wrong way. I want you to complement the faith of the people instead of undermining it. As the Dewan of Mysore said in his address to the Assembly, the Adi Karnatakas should be made better Hindus, as they belong to Hinduism. I would similarly say to you, make us better Hindus, i.e. better men or women. Why should a man, even if he becomes a Christian, be torn from his surroundings? Whilst a boy I heard it being said that to become a Christian was to have a brandy bottle in one hand and beef in the other. Things are better now, but it is not unusual to find Christianity synonymous with denationalization and

Europeanization. Must we give up our simplicity to become better people? Do not lay the axe at our simplicity.

*Q.:* There are not only two issues before us, viz., to serve and to teach; there is a third issue, viz., evangelizing, declaring the glad tidings of the coming of Jesus and his death in redemption for our sins. What is the right way of giving the good news? We need not undermine the faith, but we may make people lose their faith in lesser things.

*A.:* That lands me into the region of interpretation. Whilst I must not enter into it, I may suggest that God did not bear the Cross only 1900 years ago, but He bears it today. It would be poor comfort to the world if it had to depend upon a historical God who died 2,000 years ago. Do not then preach the God of history, but show Him as He lives today through you. In South Africa I met a number of friends, and read a number of books—Pearson, Parker and Butler—all giving their own interpretations, and I said to myself I must not bother myself with these conflicting interpretations. It is better to allow our lives to speak for us than our words. C. F. Andrews never preaches. He is incessantly doing his work. He finds enough work and stays where he finds it and takes no credit for bearing the Cross. I have the honour to know hundreds of honest Christians, but I have not known one better than Andrews.

*Q.:* But what about animistic beliefs? Should they not be corrected?

*A.:* Well, we have been working amongst the so-called untouchables and backward classes, and we have never bothered ourselves with their beliefs, animistic or otherwise. Superstitions and undesirable things go as soon as we begin to live the correct life. I concern myself not with their beliefs but with asking them to do the right thing. As soon as they do it, their belief rights itself.

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*Q.:* How can we help condemning if we feel that our Christian truth is the only reality?

*A.:* That brings me to the duty of tolerance. If you cannot feel that the other faith is as true as yours, you should feel at least that the men are as true as you. The intolerance



of the Christian missionaries does not, I am glad to say, take the ugly shape it used to take some years ago. Think of the caricature of Hinduism, which one finds in so many publications of the Christian Literature Society. A lady wrote to me the other day saying that unless I embraced Christianity all my work would be nothing worth. And of course that Christianity must mean what she understands as such! Well, all I can say is that it is a wrong attitude.

*Young India*, 11-8-'27, p. 250

## 135

## AN ADDRESS TO MISSIONARIES

[I had the pleasure of delivering an address before the missionaries in Calcutta at Y.W.C.A. on 28th ultimo. I have been supplied with short-hand notes of that address, and as it was of general interest I reproduce below an abridgment of it. I have omitted no salient thought or expression, but I have omitted some descriptive passages—M. K. G.]

Not many of you perhaps know that my association with Christians—not Christians so-called but real Christians—dates from 1889 when as a lad I found myself in London; and that association has grown riper as years have rolled on. In South Africa where I found myself in the midst of inhospitable surroundings I was able to make hundreds of Christian friends. I came in touch with the late Mr. Spencer Watton, Director of South Africa General Mission, and later with the great divine Rev. Mr. A. Murray and several others.

My acquaintance, therefore, this evening with so many missionaries is by no means a new thing. There was even a time in my life when a very sincere and intimate friend of mine, a great and good Quaker, had designs on me (laughter). He thought that I was too good not to become a Christian. I was sorry to have disappointed him. One missionary friend of mine in South Africa still writes to me and asks me, 'How is it with you?' I have always told this friend that so far as I know it is all well with me. If it was

prayer that these friends expected me to make, I was able to tell them that every day the heart-felt prayer within the closed door of my closet went to the Almighty to show me light and give wisdom and courage to follow that light.

In answer to promises made to one of these Christian friends of mine I thought it my duty to see one of the biggest of Indian Christians, as I was told he was,—the late Kali Charan Banerjee. I went over to him—I am telling you of the deep search that I have undergone in order that I might leave no stone unturned to find out the true path—I went to him with an absolutely open mind and in a receptive mood, and I met him also under circumstances which were most affecting. I found that there was much in common between Mr. Banerjee and myself. His simplicity, his humility, his courage, his truthfulness, all these things I have all along admired. He met me when his wife was on her death-bed. You cannot imagine a more impressive scene, a more ennobling circumstance. I told Mr. Banerjee, 'I have come to you as a seeker'—this was in 1901—'I have come to you in fulfilment of a sacred promise I have made to some of my dearest Christian friends that I will leave no stone unturned to find out the true light.' I told him that I had given my friends the assurance that no worldly gain would keep me away from the light, if I could but see it. Well, I am not going to engage you in giving a description of the little discussion that we had between us. It was very good, very noble. I came away, not sorry, not dejected, not disappointed, but I felt sad that even Mr. Banerjee could not convince me. This was my final deliberate striving to realize Christianity as it was presented to me. Today my position is that, though I admire much in Christianity, I am unable to identify myself with orthodox Christianity. I must tell you in all humility that Hinduism, as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being, and I find a solace in the Bhagavadgita and Upanishads that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount. Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the Sermon on the Mount have not left a deep impression on me, but I must confess to you that when



doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon I turn to the Bhagavadgita and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me, I owe it to the teaching of the Bhagavadgita.

I have told you all these things in order to make it absolutely clear to you where I stand, so that I may have, if you will, closer touch with you. I must add that I did not stop at studying the Bible and the commentaries and other books on Christianity that my friends placed in my hands; but I said to myself, if I was to find any satisfaction through reasoning, I must study the scriptures of other religions also and make my choice. And I turned to the Koran. I tried to understand what I could of Judaism as distinguished from Christianity. I studied Zoroastrianism and I came to the conclusion that all religions were right but every one of them was imperfect, imperfect naturally and necessarily, because they were interpreted with our poor intellects, sometimes with our poor hearts, and more often misinterpreted. In all religions I found to my grief that there were various and even contradictory interpretations of some texts, and I said to myself: 'Not these things for me. If I want the satisfaction of my soul, I must feel my way. I must wait silently upon God and ask Him to guide me'. There is a beautiful verse in Sanskrit which says, 'God helps only when man feels utterly helpless and utterly humble.' Some of you have come from the Tamil land. When I was studying Tamil, I found in one of the books of Dr. Pope a Tamil proverb which means 'God helps the helpless'. I have given you this life-story of my own experience for you to ponder over.

You, the missionaries come to India thinking that you come to a land of heathens, of idolaters, of men who do not know God. One of the greatest of Christian divines, Bishop Heber, wrote the two lines which have always left a sting with me: 'Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.' I wish he had not written them. My own experience in my travels throughout India has been to the contrary.

I have gone from one end of the country to the other, without any prejudice, in a relentless search after truth, and I am not able to say that here in this fair land, watered by the great Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Jumna, man is vile. He is not vile. He is as much a seeker after truth as you and I are, possibly more so. This reminds me of a French book translated for me by a French friend. It is an account of an imaginary expedition in search of knowledge. One party landed in India and found Truth and God personified, in a little pariah's hut. I tell you there are many such huts belonging to the untouchables where you will certainly find God. They do not reason, but they persist in their belief that God is. They depend upon God for His assistance and find it too. There are many stories told throughout the length and breadth of India about these noble untouchables. Vile as some of them may be there are noblest specimens of humanity in their midst. But does my experience exhaust itself merely with the untouchables? No, I am here to tell you that there are non-Brahmanas, there are Brahmanas who are as fine specimens of humanity as you will find in any place on the earth. There are Brahmanas, today in India who are embodiments of self-sacrifice, godliness and humility. There are Brahmanas who are devoting themselves body and soul to the service of untouchables, with no expectation of reward from the untouchables, but with execration from orthodoxy. They do not mind it, because in serving Pariahs they are serving God. I can quote chapter and verse from my experience. I place these facts before you in all humility for the simple reason that you may know this land better, the land to which you have come to serve. You are here to find out the distress of the people of India and to remove it. But I hope you are here also in a receptive mood, and if there is anything that India has to give, you will not stop your ears, you will not close your eyes, and steel your hearts, but open up your ears, eyes and most of all your hearts to receive all that may be good in this land. I give you my assurance that there is a great deal of good in India. Do not flatter yourselves with the belief that a mere recital of that celebrated verse in St. John makes a man a



Christian. If I have read the Bible correctly, I know many men who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ or have even rejected the official interpretation of Christianity will, probably, if Jesus came in our midst today in the flesh, be owned by him more than many of us. I therefore ask you to approach the problem before you with open-heartedness and humility.

I was engaged in a friendly conversation with some missionaries this morning. I do not want to relate that conversation. But I do want to say that they are fine specimens of humanity. They did not want to misunderstand me, but I had to pass nearly one hour and a half in my attempt to explain to them that, in writing what I had written, I had not written anything in a spirit of ill-will or hatred towards Englishmen. I was hard put to it to carry that conviction. In fact I do not know whether I carried that conviction to them at all. If salt loseth its savour, where with shall it be salted? If I could not drive home the truth that was in me to the three friends who certainly came with open minds, how should I fare with others? It has often occurred to me that a seeker after truth has to be silent. I know the wonderful efficacy of silence. I visited a Trappist monastery in South Africa. A beautiful place it was. Most of the inmates of that place were under a vow of silence. I enquired of the Father the motive of it, and he said that the motive was apparent. 'We are frail human beings. We do not know very often what we say. If we want to listen to the still small voice that is always speaking within us, it will not be heard if we continually speak.' I understood that precious lesson. I know the secret of silence. I do not know just now as I speak to you whether it would not have been wise if I had said nothing to these friends beyond saying, 'We shall know each other better when the mists have rolled away.' As I speak to you, I feel humiliated. Why did I argue with these friends? But I say these things to you first of all to make this confession, and secondly to tell you also that, if you will refuse to see the other side, if you will refuse to understand what India is thinking, then you will deny yourselves the real privilege of service. I have told my missionary friends, 'Noble

as you are, you have isolated yourselves from the people whom you want to serve.' I cannot help recalling to you the conversation I related in Darjeeling at the missionary Language School. Lord Salisbury was waited upon by a deputation of missionaries in connection with China and this deputation wanted protection. I cannot recall the exact words but give you the purport of the answer Lord Salisbury gave. He said, 'Gentlemen, if you want to go to China to preach the message of Christianity, then do not ask for assistance of the temporal power. Go with your lives in your hands and, if the people of China want to kill you, imagine that you have been killed in the service of God.' Lord Salisbury was right. Christian missionaries come to India under the shadow, or, if you like, under the protection of a temporal power, and it creates an impassable bar.

If you give me statistics that so many orphans have been reclaimed and brought to the Christian faith, I would accept them but I do not feel convinced thereby that it is your mission. In my opinion your mission is infinitely superior to that. You want to find men in India and, if you want to do that, you will have to go to the lowly cottages not to give them something, might be to take something from them. A true friend as I claim to be of the missionaries of India and of the Europeans, I speak to you what I feel from the bottom of my heart. I miss receptiveness, humility, willingness on your part to identify yourselves with the masses of India. I have talked straight from my heart. May it find a response from your hearts.

At the end of the address questions were invited. The most important questions and their answers are given below:

Q.: How do you think should the missionaries identify themselves with the masses?

A.: The question is somewhat embarrassing. But I would venture to say, 'Copy Charlie Andrews.'

Q.: Do you definitely feel the presence of the living Christ within you?

A.: If it is the historical Jesus surnamed Christ that you refer to, I must say I do not. If it is an adjective



signifying one of the names of God, then I must say I do feel the presence of God—call Him Christ, call Him Krishna, call Him Rama. We have one thousand names to denote God, and if I did not feel a presence of God within me, I see so much of misery and disappointment every day that I would be a raving maniac and my destination would be the Hooghli.

*Young India*, 6-8-'25, p. 273

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### THE LETTER KILLETH, THE SPIRIT GIVETH LIFE

(Originally appeared under the title "For Christian Friends")

"Dear Br. Gandhi,

Under a double prompting when praying for you, I sit down to write. You have had your name blazoned abroad all over the (so-called) civilized world, as one of the greatest philosophers and sacrificial workers on earth. In India you have been proclaimed the Mahatma, and actually worshipped as one of the incarnations of India's many deities, and much as you have declared that you do not encourage these ascriptions of sanctity, you would indeed be more than human if you did not occasionally feel a sweet complacency in them. Your practice also of fasting when sin has been committed, or quarrels have taken place in your Ashram or schools, has had a tendency to make Indians believe that you can merit blessing which can be communicated to others,—but has anybody been loving and courageous enough to write and challenge you as to how personally you are going to obtain atonement for your own sin? All your self-denials and fastings and prayers and good deeds cannot blot out one sin of your early days. For thirty or more years of your life you lived the carnal, self life, seeking and following your own plans and ambitions without seeking to know God's purpose for your life or to honour His Holy name. You were a trustee of talents intended to be used for the glory of God and the good of your fellow-men. Nothing that you do can obliterate the record of those years of indifference and disobedience. Every hour of every day of that period at least, lifts up its voice in condemnation. Law must be

vindicated. Some punishment must be inflicted. But, even on earth it is a recognized principle that the prerogative of an earthly king is to have mercy—and yet righteousness must be the very foundation from which mercy may flow. The laws of the Universe proclaim the impartial justice of the Creator and confirm the Bible declaration: 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die', and yet the doctrine of vicarious suffering is written in the very nature of human existence. God is love. Every pulse of love in every creature has its origin and activity from Him. Parental, mother love, all love is a manifestation or emanation from the fountain of the Divine Love. Milton sings:

'Oft ere the kindred source be down  
The kindred blood will claim his own  
And throbbing pulses silently  
Move heart to heart in sympathy.'

'If all sin is sin against God', (Psalm 51) the prerogative of forgiveness is His. If His righteous judgment is appeased by (For God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their tresspasses unto them) Himself suffering the death penalty on behalf of the race; and if, as in Phillipeans (II. 6-11) He commends every one in heaven and on earth to accept Christ as Saviour and Lord to *the glory of God the Father*—how shall we (how will you) escape if you neglect so great a salvation?

Even if, as you profess to believe, Christ was only one of many incarnations of God, and the latest of them, you must either accept His tremendous claims as of Divine Origin, or reject them as only human and fallible. And when He declares as He did to the Jews of His day—'If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins' or 'I am *the way, the truth and the life*, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me', you must either believe Him to have been self-deceived, or deliberately false. I see no other solution. I pray daily that Christ may grant you a revelation of Himself as He did to Saul of Tarsus, that before you pass off this earthly scene, you may be used to proclaim to India's millions the sacrificial efficacy of His precious blood.

Yours lovingly in His Glad service."

This is a typical letter from an old English friend who regularly writes such letters almost every six months. This friend is very earnest and well known to me. But there are numerous other correspondents unknown to me who



write in the same strain without arguing. Since now I cannot for reasons of health write to individual writers, I use this letter as a text for a general reply. Incidentally this effort will enable the readers of *Harijan* who accept my guidance to understand the nature of my religious belief.

My correspondent is a literalist. He gives its literal meaning to every text of the Bible in spite of its clear statement that "the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life". My very first reading of the Bible showed me that I would be repelled by many things in it if I gave their literal meaning to many texts or even took every passage in it as the word of God. I found as I proceeded with my study of the scriptures of the various religions that every scripture had to be treated likewise, not excepting the Vedas or the Upanishads. Therefore the story of the immaculate conception when I interpret it mystically does not repel me. I should find it hard to believe in the literal meaning of the verses relating to the immaculate conception of Jesus. Nor would it deepen my regard for Jesus if I gave those verses their literal meaning. This does not mean that the writers of the Gospels were untruthful persons. They wrote in a mood of exaltation. From my youth upward I learnt the art of estimating the value of scriptures on the basis of their ethical teaching. Miracles therefore had no interest for me. The miracles said to have been performed by Jesus, even if I had believed them literally, would not have reconciled me to any teaching that did not satisfy universal ethics. Somehow or other, words of religious teachers have for me, as I presume for millions, a living force which the same words uttered by ordinary mortals do not possess.

Jesus then to me is a great world teacher among others. He was to the devotees of his generation no doubt 'the only begotten son of God'. Their belief need not be mine. He affects my life no less because I regard him as one among the many begotten sons of God. The adjective 'begotten' has, for me, a deeper and possibly a grander meaning than its literal meaning. For me it implies spiritual birth. In his own times he was the nearest to God.

Jesus atoned for the sins of those who accepted his teachings by being an infallible example to them. But the example was worth nothing to those who never troubled to change their lives. A regenerate outgrows the original taint even as purified gold outgrows the original alloy.

I have made the frankest admission of my many sins. But I do not carry their burden on my shoulders. If I am journeying Godward, as I feel I am, it is safe with me. For I feel the warmth of the sunshine of His presence. My austerities, fastings and prayers are, I know, of no value, if I rely upon them for reforming me. But they have an inestimable value, if they represent, as I hope they do, the yearnings of a soul striving to lay his weary head in the lap of his Maker.

The Gita has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God. "Verily verily I say unto you, not every one that sayeth unto me Lord Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven shall enter the Kingdom," was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world.

*Harijan*, 18-4-'36, p. 76

## UNTRUTH OF THEOLOGY

(From "Occasional Notes" by M. D.)

If there is one thing that one can genuinely admire in the missionaries, it is their persistence. They know what Gandhiji has to say in reply to their stock questions, but they go on asking them in the spirit of converting him or, I take it, being in their turn converted. A group of them saw him at Sevagram the other day. We were busy packing to go to Ramgarh and there was hardly any time that



Gandhiji could spare. But he promised to see them for five minutes. And they did indeed make the best of their time.

“What started you on your career of leadership?” was the queer question with which they started.

“It came to me, unsought, unasked,” said Gandhiji rather embarrassed. “I do not know, though, what sort of leader I am, and whether what I am doing is leadership or service. But whatever it is, it came to me unasked.”

But the friends who came were sure that they were leaders, and they asked for guidance as leaders of Christian thought.

“All I can say,” said Gandhiji, “is that there should be less of theology and more of truth in all that you say and do.”

“Will you kindly explain it?”

“How can I explain the obvious? Amongst agents of the many untruths that are propounded in the world one of the foremost is theology. I do not say that there is no demand for it. There is a demand in the world for many a questionable thing. But even those who have to do with theology as part of their work have to survive their theology. I have two good Christian friends who gave up theology and decided to live the gospel of Christ.”

“Are you sure that no great result has come through your own study of Jesus?”

“Why, there is no doubt that it has come, but not, let me tell you, through theology or through the ordinary interpretation of theologians. For many of them contend that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply to mundane things, and that it was only meant for the twelve disciples. Well I do not believe this. I think the Sermon on the Mount has no meaning if it is not of vital use in everyday life to everyone.”

“Is there not to be found a solution of the present-day problems in the teaching of Jesus?”

“Well you are now dragging me in deeper waters,” exclaimed Gandhiji, “and you will drown me.”

## AS I LOOK AT CHRISTIANITY

(Originally appeared under the title "Gandhiji at Colombo Y.M.C.A.")

Addressing a huge gathering in the hall of Y.M.C.A., Colombo, Gandhiji welcomed the occasion as one more instance of the close touch, he was daily finding himself in, of Christians throughout the world. 'There are some who will not even take my flat denial when I tell them that I am not a Christian,' said Gandhiji, and in trying to explain his own attitude to Christianity gave in his own humble way a message to the whole of the Christian world.

"The message of Jesus, as I understand it, is contained in his Sermon on the Mount unadulterated and taken as whole, and even in connection with the Sermon on the Mount, my own humble interpretation of the message is in many respects different from the orthodox. The message, to my mind, has suffered distortion in the West. It may be presumptuous for me to say so, but as a devotee of truth, I should not hesitate to say what I feel. I know that the world is not waiting to know my opinion on Christianity.

"One's own religion is after all a matter between oneself and one's Maker and no one else's, but if I feel impelled to share my thoughts with you this evening, it is because I want to enlist your sympathy in my search for truth and because so many Christian friends are interested in my thoughts on the teachings of Jesus. If then I had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and my own interpretation of it, I should not hesitate to say, 'Oh yes, I am a Christian'. But I know that at the present moment if I said any such thing I would lay myself open to the gravest misinterpretation. I should lay myself open to fraudulent claims because I would have then to tell you what my own meaning of Christianity is, and I have no desire myself to give you my own view of Christianity. But negatively I can tell you that in my humble opinion, much of what passes as Christianity is a negation of the Sermon on the Mount. And please mark my words. I am not at the present moment speaking



of Christian conduct. I am speaking of the Christian belief, of Christianity as it is understood in the West. I am painfully aware of the fact that conduct everywhere falls far short of belief. But I don't say this by way of criticism. I know from the treasures of my own experience that although I am every moment of my life trying to live up to my professions, my conduct falls short of these professions. Far therefore be it from me to say this in a spirit of criticism. But I am placing before you my fundamental difficulties. When I began as a prayerful student to study the Christian literature in South Africa in 1893, I asked myself 'Is this Christianity?' and have always got the Vedic answer, 'Neti Neti' (not this, not this). And the deepest in me tells me that I am right.

"I claim to be a man of faith and prayer, and even if I was cut to pieces, God would give me the strength not to deny Him and to assert that He is. The Muslim says He is and there is no one else. The Christian says the same thing and so the Hindu, and if I may say so, even the Buddhist says the same thing, if in different words. We may each of us be putting our own interpretation on the word God,—God who embraces not only this tiny globe of ours, but millions and billions of such globes. How can we, little crawling creatures, so utterly helpless as He has made us, how could we possibly measure His greatness, His boundless love, His infinite compassion, such that He allows man insolently to deny Him, wrangle about Him, and cut the throat of his fellowman? How can we measure the greatness of God who is so forgiving, so divine? Thus though we may utter the same words they have not the same meaning for us all. And hence I say that we do not need to *proselytize* or do *shuddhi* or *tabligh* through our speech or writing. We can only do it really with our lives. Let them be open books for all to study. Would that I could persuade the missionary friends to take this view of their mission. Then there will be no distrust, no suspicion, no jealousy and no dissensions."

Gandhiji then took the case of modern China as a case in point. His heart, he said, went out to young China in the throes of a great national upheaval, and he referred

to the anti-Christian movement in China, about which he had occasion to read in a pamphlet received by him from the students' department of the Young Women's Christian Association and Young Men's Christian Association of China. The writers had put their own interpretation upon the anti-Christian movement, but there was no doubt that Young China regarded Christian movements as being opposed to Chinese self-expression. To Gandhiji the moral of the anti-Christian manifestation was clear. He said: "Don't let your Christian propaganda be anti-national, say these young Chinese. And even their Christian friends have come to distrust the Christian endeavour that had come from the West. I present the thought to you that these essays written by young men have a deep meaning, a deep truth, because they were themselves trying to justify their Christian conduct in so far as they had been able to live up to the life it had taught them and at the same time find a basis for that opposition. The deduction I would like you all to draw from this manifestation is that you Ceylonese should not be torn from your moorings, and those from the West should not consciously or unconsciously lay violent hands upon the manners, customs and habits of the Ceylonese in so far as they are not repugnant to fundamental ethics and morality. Confuse not Jesus' teaching with what passes as modern civilization, and pray do not do unconscious violence to the people among whom you cast your lot. It is no part of that call, I assure you, to tear the lives of the people of the East by its roots. Tolerate whatever is good in them and do not hastily, with your preconceived notions, judge them. Do not judge lest you be judged yourselves. In spite of your belief in the greatness of Western civilization and in spite of your pride in all your achievements, I plead with you for humility, and ask you to leave some little room for doubt, in which as Tennyson sang, there was more truth, though by 'doubt' he no doubt meant a different thing. Let us each one live our life, and if ours is the right life, where is the cause for hurry? It will react of itself."

The Y.M.C.A. has among its members Buddhists also, and the president had specially asked Gandhiji to



say a word of advice to the Christian and Buddhist youth. He gave the following message:

“To you, young Ceylonese friends, I say: Don’t be dazzled by the splendour that comes to you from the West. Do not be thrown off your feet by this passing show. The Enlightened One has told you in never-to-be forgotten words that this little span of life is but a passing shadow, a fleeting thing, and if you realize the nothingness of all that appears before your eyes, the nothingness of this material case that we see before us ever changing, then indeed there are treasures for you up above, and there is peace for you down here, peace which passeth all understanding, and happiness to which we are utter strangers. It requires an amazing faith, a divine faith and surrender of all that we see before us. What did Buddha do, and Christ do, and also Mahomed? Theirs were lives of self-sacrifice and renunciation. Buddha renounced every worldly happiness, because he wanted to share with the whole world his happiness which was to be had by men who sacrificed and suffered in search for truth. If it was a good thing to scale the heights of Mt. Everest, sacrificing precious lives in order to be able to go there and make some slight observations, if it was a glorious thing to give up life after life in planting a flag in the uttermost extremities of the earth, how much more glorious would it be to give not one life, surrender not a million lives but a billion lives in search of the potent and imperishable truth? So be not lifted off your feet, do not be drawn away from the simplicity of your ancestors. A time is coming when those, who are in the mad rush today of multiplying their wants, vainly thinking that they add to the real substance, real knowledge of the world, will retrace their steps and say: ‘What have we done?’ Civilizations have come and gone, and in spite of all our vaunted progress I am tempted to ask again and again ‘To what purpose?’ Wallace, a contemporary of Darwin, has said the same thing. Fifty years of brilliant inventions and discoveries, he has said, has not added one inch to the moral height of mankind. So said a dreamer and visionary if you will,—Tolstoy. So said

Jesus, and Buddha, and Mahomed, whose religion is being denied and falsified in my own country today.

“By all means drink deep of the fountains that are given to you in the Sermon on the Mount, but then you will have to take sackcloth and ashes. The teaching of the Sermon was meant for each and every one of us. You cannot serve both God and Mammon. God the Compassionate and Merciful, Tolerance incarnate, allows Mammon to have his nine days’ wonder. But I say to you, youths of Ceylon, fly from the self-destroying but destructive show of Mammon.”

*Young India*, 8-12-'27, p. 413

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## DIRECT AND INDIRECT CONTRIBUTION OF MISSIONARIES

(A question and answer thereto from an article entitled “A Student’s Questions” are reproduced below)

*Q.:* I would like to know your very frank evaluation of the work of Christian missionaries in India. Do you believe that Christianity has some contribution to make to the life of our country? Can we do without Christianity?

*A.:* In my opinion Christian missionaries have done good to us indirectly. Their direct contribution is probably more harmful than otherwise. I am against the modern method of proselytizing. Years’ experience of proselytizing both in South Africa and India has convinced me that it has not raised the general moral tone of the converts who have imbibed the superficialities of European civilization, and have missed the teaching of Jesus. I must be understood to refer to the general tendency and not to brilliant exceptions. The indirect contribution, on the other hand, of Christian missionary effort is great. It has stimulated Hindus and Musalman religious research. It has forced us to put our own houses in order. The great educational and curative institutions of Christian missions



I also count, amongst indirect results, because they have been established, not for their own sakes, but as an aid to proselytizing.

The world, and therefore we, can no more do without the teaching of Jesus than we can without that of Mahomed or the Upanishads. I hold all these to be complementary of one another, in no case, exclusive. Their true meaning, their inter-dependence and inter-relation, have still to be revealed to us. We are but indifferent representatives of our respective faiths, which we belie more often than not.

*Young India*, 17-12-'25, p. 440

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### HOW TO SERVE CHRIST BETTER

(From "With Gandhiji in Bengal—VI" by M.D.)

A most important function was the meeting with some missionary friends. There is a little school of languages being conducted by Miss Rowlands. It is open only to missionaries serving in India and Gandhiji was invited to address them one morning. It was a quiet function, not more than a hundred people attending. Miss Rowlands in a brief felicitous speech gave Gandhiji the cue so to say. They welcomed him, she said, as the champion of the outcaste and the downtrodden, as one who offered nothing but suffering in his own person, as a great servant of India, and if possible, a greater servant of suffering humanity. 'Please tell us then,' she said, 'how to serve Christ better.' It touched the deepest chords of his heart, and he spoke from the very depths trusting that his message might reach not only their intellects but their hearts also. It is difficult to summarize it within the brief space of this letter. But if it is not unfair to do so, I shall just try to recapitulate it.

He explained at the outset the nature of his own mission. Whether it was politics or religion, it was pre-eminently a mission of self-purification. And purification of the heart means a purification in all the departments of

life which far from being like watertight compartments are a beautiful whole. "For me, politics bereft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words a seeker after God and Truth. For me, God and Truth are convertible terms and if any one told me that God was a god of untruth or a god of torture I would decline to worship him. Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven."

Having thus cleared the meaning of his mission, he proceeded to answer Miss Rowlands' appeal. Would it not be presumption to tell them how they, the bearers of the message of Jesus, could serve Jesus better? But because there were Christian friends who regarded his activities with the greatest sympathy and even with approval, he would in all humility, tell them what he thought. And recalling his Madras speech before a Christian Mission in 1916, he gave frank and free expression to his views about the proselytizing activity of all missionary religions. "Proselytizing has done some good, but it has perhaps been outweighed by the evil it has left behind. Whether you profess one religion or another is of no consequence whatsoever. What God will say, and wants us to say, is not what we profess with our lips but what we believe in our hearts; and there is no shadow of doubt that there are thousands and thousands of men and women in the world who do not know the Bible or the name of Jesus or of His amazing sacrifice, but who are far more God-fearing than many a Christian who knows the Bible, offers his prayers regularly and believes sincerely that he follows all the Ten Commandments. Religion is made of sterner stuff, and it is impossible for us frail, weak human beings to understand what people mean when they say that they would be better if they professed something else from what they did." And he recalled his conversation with a South African chaplain who, after considerable questioning and cross-questioning, had told him that he would not thenceforth want to convert him. "It is not he who says 'Lord' 'Lord'," I told him, "who enters the Kingdom of Heaven, but he



that doeth His will'." I reminded him, "I am conscious of my weaknesses, and try to fight them,—not in my own strength but in the strength of God. Is that enough or do you wish me to repeat parrot-like that Jesus had cleansed me from all sin?" He stopped me and said, "I understand what you mean." So I say that instead of wanting to find out how many heads you count as Christian, work away like Sir Gibbie, silently among the people and let your work be the silent testimony of your worth. What do you want to convert them for? If your contact with them ennobles them, makes them forget untruth, all evil and brings them a ray of light, is that not enough? Or in case you have taken charge of an orphan, if you feed him and clothe him, is that not enough? Is that not its own reward? Or must you have a mechanical confession from him that he is a Christian? We see today a rivalry, a war going on among different religions as to the number of adherents each can boast. I feel deeply humiliated and feel that in every one of the feats we claim to have performed in converting people to our faith we are denying our God and being untrue to ourselves."

In the latter part of his speech he paid a glowing tribute to missionaries who had worked in field of Indian vernacular literatures, opening out to Indians their hidden treasures, and congratulated the conductors of the Language School of Darjeeling. But that was hardly enough if they wanted 'to serve Christ better'. They must pick up the poorest portion of humanity and identify themselves with them, never seeking protection from temporal power, but ever glorying in the strength of God, 'penetrating the masses with your lives in the palm of your hands'. And in explaining what identification with the masses meant he drew a vivid picture of the ghastly skeletons under the shadow of Jagannath—a picture he has drawn more than once in *Young India* and is never tired of drawing over and over again. Thus came in the Charkha and 'the champion of the downtrodden and suffering humanity' delivered himself of his message.

*Young India*, 18-6-'25, p. 214

## THE OXFORD GROUP AND MORAL REARMAMENT

(By M. D.)

### **The Oxford Group Movement**

During recent years plenty of literature has been sent to us pertaining to the Oxford Group Movement and its work, and we have met not a few members of the Group. I had the advantage of being invited to a number of what they call their "house-parties" in England, and had the privilege of meeting a few good members in Abbottabad.

We have found them refreshingly frank, and the friend who met Gandhiji in Abbottabad made a few confessions that did credit to him. On some of the basic principles we found ourselves in complete agreement. Thus the emphasis on improving oneself rather than expecting others to improve, and on expecting the guidance of God in every act of our lives, is one to which every believer in truth and non-violence would subscribe. The friend who met Gandhiji described, as the object of the movement the 'eradication of fear by bringing people under the guidance of God'.

"That," said Gandhiji, "is the only correct position and no other is possible. If you have followed my writings, you know that I have declared that no one is competent to offer Satyagraha unless he has a living faith in God. I had formerly not the courage to say so bluntly to my co-workers. I knew it was difficult to get a heart response to this thing. For there are many who say they have a living faith and yet are not God-fearing, and others who scoff at the idea of believing in God and yet are at heart God-fearing. But I said it did not matter how difficult it was, I must put it forward as I know it."

"You came only recently to the conclusion that you must insist on the condition?"

"Yes. I felt I must make it an indispensable condition. I knew it, I practised it, but had not declared it for acceptance by all. I knew some resented this and even



imputed to me motives of excluding them from the chosen circle. But I said I must take even the risk of being misunderstood but must declare the truth at all cost. How to reduce the whole thing to practice I do not know."

"That," said the friend, "is simply terrific. To hear you say that it is difficult is tremendous, for it is an encouragement to me. There is a kind of hero-worship that attributes to you superhuman powers. It is something to hear that you have difficulties and are human, and thus to feel kinship with you. Then there is another thing that has come home to me. You must not think of taking but always of giving something."

"That is right in a sense," said Gandhiji, "but you can't give without taking, and to go on saying that you would always give would be humbug."

### **Their Creed**

Honesty, purity, unselfishness and love are their four-fold principles, and the friend said that whilst the first two would come under the heading 'truth', the other two would come under the heading 'non-violence or bravery'. Tolstoy we may remember, built up, five commandments out of the teachings of Jesus and called them the commandments of peace, and we of the present day and members of the Gandhi Seva Sangh have summed up our daily rule of conduct in eleven vows which in the ultimate analysis could be summed up in truth and non-violence. Life is what matters, and without giving oneself any label one may find a world of inspiration from one single text of any of the great teachers: "He that loveth his life shall lose it, he that will lose his life shall save it"; "Conquer untruth by truth and hatred by love"; "Leave all duties and unto Me seek refuge"; or "Surrender to Him than whom there is no greater".

These friends of the Oxford Group believe in seeking guidance from God, and I have in their house-parties seen numerous people coming up before the meeting and declaring that he or she was converted. I said to myself there was every chance here of self-deception, as conversion from untruth to truth, from darkness to light and from

death to immortality could not come in the twinkling of an eye but was the fruit of a long process of striving towards perfection. I also said to the friends whom I have met that true guidance of God could come only to the pure in heart who alone "shall see God" and not all may go on saying they were God-guided. I am glad to say that none of the friends with whom I have discussed these matters countered my position.

### **Life — the Touch Stone**

And as I have said that life is what matters, Gandhiji was discussing the position with a civilian. Under God's guidance he has to know people on a new basis, in fact his status changes altogether; and he has to meet everyone as brother to brother. "How is a civilian who is trained not to establish any human contact with the ruled to fare under this rule?" asked Gandhiji. "Perhaps you will not admit that they are so trained?"

"No," said he.

"Well you will by and by. I do not make a charge of it. It was worldly wisdom that dictated the course to those who organized the service. How could they allow them to live on terms of familiarity with those over whom they had to rule, especially when the rulers were only a handful? And yet if you accept the creed of the Oxford Group, you have to establish human contact with me. And if you do it with me, you must do it with others. You will have to contact the whole of India through me, and I with all Englishmen through you. That at any rate is what the Oxford Group must stand for, otherwise it would be like many other similar movements."

"You are right, and that is why I kept out of freemasonry. We have to meet under God and we shall not make demands from another which are inconsistent with the guidance of God."

"Anyway," said Gandhiji, "I have expressed my difficulty."

### **Moral Rearmament**

The difficulty would seem to be greater when we think of the programme of moral rearmament with which the



Oxford Movement has identified itself. Dr. Frank Buchman, the founder of the movement, initiated this Moral Rearmament movement, and President Roosevelt advocated, before four thousand persons assembled in Constitution Hall in America, moral rearmament as a means of maintaining world peace. "A programme of moral rearmament for the world cannot fail to lessen the dangers of armed conflict. Such moral rearmament must receive support on a world-wide basis", said he. And we are told twenty-three members of the House of Lords supported the appeal declaring that "men and nations must be spiritually equipped with faith and love".

Now what is one to make of this movement? Gandhiji was invited to put his signature to a "response" to President Roosevelt's message. Two of the paragraphs in it read thus:

"MRA means first of all a change of heart. It means admission of our responsibility for the past, a frank acceptance by nations as by individuals of the standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love and daily listening and daily obedience to God's direction.

"At this fateful hour we pledge ourselves to give the last measure of our devotion—the service of heart, mind, will—to the Moral and Spiritual Rearmament of our nation—to building the world of to-morrow, the world of new men, new nations, where every resource of human genius is liberated under God's leadership to enrich the heritage of all mankind."

With all deference to those in India who had signed this "response" Gandhiji said he could not in all conscience sign this. He could not endorse a falsehood. How can India accept responsibility for the past? "All this," said Gandhiji, "has no application to me. The whole paragraph applies to exploiting nations, whereas India is an exploited nation. The second paragraph too applies to nations of the West and not to us. The whole appeal is so unreal. I can think of moral rearmament, but that would be in a different setting. I can think of communal unity through moral rearmament. As a member of an exploited nation I can have a different moral rearmament programme,

and I may invite China to it, but how can I invite the West or Japan? And just as it would be unreal for me to invite the West, it would to that extent be unreal for the West to invite India. Let them shed their exploitation policy and their immoral gains first.”

Gandhiji has been invited to a Moral Rearmament camp in Kashmir and the invitation is signed by an I.C.S., a Brigadier, and a Judge. I wonder if they have thought of the aspect presented here by Gandhiji. How can anyone work for peace who has not dissociated himself from the Empire and all it means? As Mr. Charles Roden Buxton has said: “The British Empire, in its present exclusive form, with its imperial preference system—and with all the envies, suspicions, and criticisms which it causes throughout the world—is one of the greatest obstacles to world peace.”

*Harijan*, 12-8-'39, p. 234

## IS ISLAM INSPIRED?

(Appeared in the “Notes”)

A writer in a Muslim paper has suggested that, if I regard Islam as an inspired religion and Muhammad as the Prophet of God, I should declare my belief, so that Mussalmans' doubts may be dispelled and Hindu-Muslim unity may possibly be more easily achieved. I read the suggestion about a month ago, but I did not think it necessary to respond to it. But as now-a-days I read as many Muslim papers as I can, in order to acquaint myself with the Muslim mind, and as I find them so full of poison and conscious or unconscious untruths, I feel it necessary to re-declare my opinion about Islam, though I think it is well known. I certainly regard Islam as one of the inspired religions, and therefore the Holy Koran as an inspired book and Muhammad as one of the prophets. But even so I regard Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism as inspired religions. The names of many of them have been already forgotten, for the simple reason that those religions and



those prophets related to the particular ages for which and peoples for whom they flourished. Some principal religions are still extant. After a study of those religions to the extent it was possible for me, I have come to the conclusion that, if it is proper and necessary to discover an underlying unity among all religions, a master-key is needed. That master-key is that of truth and non-violence. When I unlock the chest of a religion with this master-key, I do not find it difficult to discover its likeness with other religions. When you look at these religions as so many leaves of a tree they seem so different, but at the trunk they are one. Unless and until we realize this fundamental unity, wars in the name of religion will not cease. These are not confined to Hindus and Musalmans alone. The pages of world history are soiled with the bloody accounts of these religious wars. Religion can be defended only by the purity of its adherents and their good deeds, never by their quarrels with those of other faiths.

*Harijan*, 13-7-'40, p. 207

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#### A MUSLIM'S DILEMMA

(From "Question Box")

*Q.:* We Muslims believe that the Prophet's life was wholly directed by God and truly non-violent, though not in your sense of the term. He never waged an offensive war, and he had the tenderest regard for the feeling of others, but when he was driven to a defensive war he drew his sword for a holy war, and he permits the use of the sword under conditions he has laid down. But your non-violence is different. You prescribe it under all conditions and circumstances. I do not think the Prophet would permit this. Whom are we to follow—you or the Prophet? If we follow you we cease to be Muslims. If we follow the Prophet, we cannot join the Congress with its creed of extreme non-violence. Will you solve this dilemma?

*A.:* I can only answer that, since you notice the difference, you should unhesitatingly follow the Prophet,

not me. Only I would like to say that I claim to have studied the life of the Prophet and the Koran as a detached student of religions. And I have come to the conclusion that the teaching of the Koran is essentially in favour of non-violence. Non-violence is better than violence, it is said in the Koran. Non-violence is enjoined as a duty, violence is permitted as a necessity. I must refuse to sit in judgment on what the Prophet did. I must base my conduct on what the great teachers of the earth said, not on what they did. Prophethood came not from the wielding of the sword, it came from years of wrestling with God to know the truth. Erase these precious years of the great life, and you will have robbed the Prophet of his prophethood. It is these years of his life which made Muhammad a prophet. A prophet's life, after he is acknowledged as one, cannot be our guide. Only prophets can weigh the work of prophets. If a civilian can judge the merits of a soldier, a layman of a scientist, an ordinary man may judge a prophet, much less imitate him. If I handled a motor car, I should surely run it and me into the danger zone and probably into the jaws of death. How much more dangerous would it be then for me to imitate a prophet! When the Prophet was asked why, if he could fast more than the prescribed times, the companions also could not, he promptly replied: "God gives me spiritual food which satisfies even the bodily wants; for you He has ordained the Ramzan. You may not copy me." I quote from memory.

*Harijan*, 13-7-'40, p. 193



## ISLAM TOO A RELIGION OF PEACE

(The following extracts are reproduced from an article which originally appeared under the title "A Candid Critic".)

But I do regard Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are. No doubt there are differences in degree but the object of these religions is peace. I know the passages that can be quoted from the Koran to the contrary. But so is it possible to quote passages from the Vedas to the contrary. What is the meaning of imprecations pronounced against the Anaryas? Of course, these passages bear today a different meaning, but at one time they did wear a dreadful aspect. What is the meaning, of the treatment of untouchables by us Hindus? Let not the pot call the kettle black. The fact is that we are all growing. I have given my opinion that the followers of Islam are too free with the sword. But that is not due to the teaching of the Koran. That is due in my opinion to the environment in which Islam was born. Christianity has a bloody record against it, not because Jesus was found wanting, but because the environment in which it spread was not responsive to his lofty teaching.

These two, Christianity and Islam, are, after all, religions but of yesterday. They are yet in the course of being interpreted. I reject the claim of *maulvis* to give a final interpretation to the message of Mahomed, as I reject that of the Christian clergy to give a final interpretation to the message of Jesus. Both are being interpreted in the lives of those who are living these messages in silence and in perfect self-dedication. Bluster is no religion, nor is vast learning stored in capacious brains. The Seat of religions is in the heart. We Hindus, Christians, Musalmans and others have to write the interpretation of our respective faiths with our own crimson blood and not otherwise.

*Young India*, 20-1-'27, p. 21

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